

Mission One: Our Next Five Years
A Plan Book for 2011
Year of Prayer, Fasting, and Reconciliation
SECTION 1. PRAYER AND FASTING

The materials collected here have been compiled with a threefold purpose. First, they are designed to encourage the development of a teaching series or sermon series on prayer as a means to call our people to a broader involvement in this essential Christian discipline. Second, they are designed to provide resources for an emphasis to help make personal prayer more vibrant and more frequent among our people. Third, these materials have been developed to introduce and/or expand awareness of and involvement in the Christian discipline of fasting.

Several examples of preaching on the subject of prayer are included. For the most part these are preaching notes or detailed outlines used by local pastors as they stood before their congregations. Some issues of style, punctuation, and grammar have been addressed; but primarily these notes and outlines have been left intact. The experienced preacher will understand that these notes and outlines are designed as communication aids, not as finished literary documents.

The variety of content included here should spark the creative energies of the preaching pastor to further refine, customize, and preach a personal series on prayer.

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PRAYER THE GREAT ADVENTURE

"Prayer the Great Adventure", a four part sermons series, was preached by Dr. Jim Pratt from the pulpit of the First General Baptist Church of Oakland City, Indiana. Dr. Pratt served this older, well-established congregation as interim pastor during the time he preached this series.

Embedded in these basic manuscripts the reader will find a formal outlined structure that could be isolated and utilized with the borrowing pastor's own content and illustration. Underlined words in the section headings indicate possible fill-in-the-blank words for sermon notes printed in the weekly bulletin and/or for power point slides.

Prayer the Great Adventure, Sermon 1

Prayer Can Change Your Life

Matthew 6:9-13

By Dr. Jim Pratt

I. What is Prayer?

We're going to look at the subject of prayer for the next few weeks. Why? Because the average Christian often seems to know more about self help from popular counselors or the current books/articles available than they do about prayer. There are a lot of faulty misconceptions about prayer, a lot of ignorance about how prayer works and why we pray and when to pray. Some people think prayer is a magic wand. We kind of wave it at something -- a superstitious approach -- and we get what we want. God is kind of like a genie. We rub the vase, God comes out, and we make our request by praying, and God says -- "My wish is your command!"

Some people think prayer is a first-aid kit. For them, prayer is an act of desperation, like a sign for a fire extinguisher: "Use only in case of emergency." For a lot of people, prayer is like that: Use only in emergency. It is a last resort. When things finally fall apart, then you pray. A church leader came to his pastor one day. The pastor reviewed his request for help and advice and then said, "I guess all we can do is pray." To which the church member replied with some alarm, "Has it come to that?" For us, prayer is like the last thing. You do everything you can, and then you pray.

For some people, prayer is a tug-of-war. It is a religious con game to be played with in which you try to convince Him to do something nice for you. The idea is you have to beg and plead since God is some cold-hearted monarch sitting a million miles out in outer space, and you have to urge and beg and plead to convince Him to do something good for you. It's like a sales pitch. You keep pestering God until finally He gets so irritated that He finally says, "OK, I'll give it to you," and He gives in. It's like conning God into giving you what you want; and, if you pray hard enough, eventually He gives in, reluctantly. Yet Jesus told a parable to illustrate the exact opposite.

The worst idea, or the worst misconception, about prayer for many people, is that prayer is simply a religious duty. The basic motivation behind it is guilt. I know I should pray more, I ought to pray; it's something I ought to do. It becomes a duty. You have a sense of obligation that if you don't pray you'll be on God's Black List. As a result, you go through a meaningless ritual that becomes a rut. You learn memorized phrases, you get caught in religious clichés, and say the same thing over and over. It is totally meaningless to you, but you know you ought to do it. When you think of prayer you think of one word -- boring! You think, *Why do I have to pray?* It becomes something you endure rather than something you enjoy.

If prayer is a duty for you, you have missed its total point. You don't understand prayer, if you think of it only as a duty. It's no wonder you can't get motivated if you're going around saying, "I should pray, I must pray, I have to pray." Today let's look at the purposes of prayer.

II. Prayer is an act of dedication.

A. It is an opportunity to express both our devotion to God and our dependence upon God. It is an act of dedicating ourselves, saying, "God, I need you." One major complication in prayer is we don't feel a dependence upon God. We think we can do things by ourselves. Ever since Adam and Eve, man has vastly overestimated his ability. So we go on thinking, *I don't need to pray because this is something I just do*. The biggest problem in prayer is admitting we need God's help.

The reason why a lot of people don't pray is because it costs. It costs honesty. You have to be honest to God: "I admit I am inadequate. I am helpless. I need your help in this situation." As long as you think you're self-sufficient, prayer can have no meaning for you. You think you've got it all together. Prayer is an act of dedication: "God, I admit I have a need. I need your help in my life." Prayer is a declaration of dependence upon God. It's our way of saying to God, "This proves I'm depending upon you."

B. John 15:5-7 states, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (NIV). Jesus is giving an illustration of a plant: I am like a vine and you Christians are like the branches. He is saying, "If you really put your dependence in me, you can ask whatever you will; and I will give it." That's an unbelievable promise in prayer! It's like a branch and vine. The branch is connected to the vine or stem. If you cut the branch off, it loses all its strength, all its power. If you cut a Christian off from God, he withers.

C. Prayer is our support system. You cut it off and you run out of spiritual air. Prayer is an act of dedication. It shows our dependence. Until we realize we need God, we won't or can't pray.

III. Prayer is an act of communication.

A. Most of our problems in life are communication problems. Most of your problems come from poor communication. You can't understand a person in marriage unless you communicate. And you can't understand God, God's will for your life, unless you communicate with Him.

B. You can't communicate with somebody unless you know your relationship to that person. What is our relationship to God? John 15:15 states, "I no longer call you servants,

because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (NIV). He says the reason you can ask anything in prayer is because you are friends. Isn't that amazing? God says, "I don't treat you like servants, like slaves. I treat you as friends."

C. Our problem is that we have a hard time believing God is really interested in us. We can't seem to conceive that the Creator of the entire universe is interested in car payments and house payments and buying new clothes for the kids for school and the guy at work who irritates you and the fact that you have back problems and everything else. When you fully discover how much God really loves you, prayer will no longer be a problem for you. The problem is not, "I have to pray." The problem is you don't really realize how much God cares about and loves you.

D. If you find prayer is a duty, a ritual, a routine that you don't look forward to going through, it means you don't understand how much God's in love with you and how much He's interested in everything that is of interest to you. Prayer is an act of dedication. It is the way we express our dependence upon God. Prayer is an act of communication. It is the way we communicate with God.

IV. Prayer is an act of supplication.

A. Supplication means request. Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (NIV). The result of your asking, your requests in prayer, will be peace of mind. Prayer is an act of supplication. It is how we make our requests.

B. When we read the New Testament and read about the New Testament Christians, they are unbelievable. They are happy, joyful, contagious, and enthusiastic about life. They had power in their lives. They saw miracles happening on a regular basis. If you asked a typical New Testament Christian, "How's it going?" he'd say, "Business as usual. One miracle after another!" We say, "Why don't I have that kind of power? Why don't we have that same kind of power they had in the New Testament?" We don't ask.

C. There is a true story about a high school student who had just become a Christian. He was learning all these words about God. Big theological words. God is omnipresent -- that means God is present everywhere. God is omnipotent -- that means God has all power; there is nothing too hard for Him. Then the student learned God is omniscient -- that means God knows everything: the past, the present, the future. So the student went home one day and thought, *If you know everything that's going to happen in the future, that means you know what's going to be on the Algebra final before the teacher even writes it.* With that new awareness he prayed, "God, if you know what's going to be on the test, I pray that you'll help me know what to study for, that I'll study the right things."

He began to study, pray, work. He said, "You said to ask for anything, so I'm going to be specific. God, I pray that I'll get an 87 grade on my test." He didn't have enough faith for an A, I guess. He prays for an 87. This is a true story.

He took the test the next day and thought he did pretty good on it. He went back to school the next day and found he'd gotten an 86. He was really discouraged. He was a brand new Christian and didn't know any better than just to believe God. "God", the student complained, "you really let me down! I prayed for an 87 and only got an 86. I really believed you were going to do it." He went back to school the next day and the teacher said, "I made a mistake on five papers. I need to call those papers back in." His was one of the recalled papers and when it was correctly scored he discovered he'd gotten an 87!

Why did I tell you that? So you could get an A on your final? No. I'm trying to tell you that God is intensely interested in every factor of your life. He says, "You are my friends. I'm interested!" When you love someone you're interested in everything about them. Prayer is an act of dependence or dedication. It's an act of communication. It's an act of supplication. Ask.

V. Prayer is an act of cooperation.

A. This is the most exciting thing about prayer. It's an act of cooperation. God has sovereignly chosen, in His plan, that we can cooperate in His plan by praying and helping see His work done here on earth. Prayer is God's program. Prayer is God's modus operandi. Prayer is God saying, "I have chosen to limit myself to what I accomplish on earth simply by limiting myself to the faith of My children on the earth. What they believe me for, I will do." When we pray for other people, we are cooperating with God. We are teaming up with God to accomplish God's work in the world.

B. Probably the most amazing verse in the Bible is John 14:12-13. Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." Have you been doing what Jesus has been doing? Have you been raising any dead people lately? Healed any sick?

C. I think that's the hardest verse in the Bible to believe. How is it possible to do greater miracles than Jesus? Simple. Through prayer. By prayer. When we pray, we can do greater things than Jesus Christ did while He was here on earth. You say, "How is that possible?" Simple. Prayer is not limited by time, nor by space. It is limitless in scope. When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He voluntarily limited Himself by becoming a human. By God coming in human form He said, "I can be at only one place at one time and I can't be in the past, the present, and the future at the same time. I can only be at this time and in this place." He was limited to do the miracles within the vicinity where He was.

D. But prayer is not limited by time or space. Prayers are not limited by time. The prayers of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago are still being answered today. The prayers I pray today can be answered three weeks from today. They're not limited by time. Prayer is not limited by space. You can pray, and it's like sending a missile. I could pray for somebody in Washington, D.C. and it's like sending a missile directly to that guy's heart and I never leave my home. My prayers can reach all over the world. I can get up tomorrow morning and pray for missionaries around the world.

E. Many times I have people come to me for counseling, kind of discouraged with an impossible situation. They come and say, "I'm so discouraged. I don't know what to do. I guess the only thing I can do is pray." I want to say, "Great! At least you've got a resource that most of the world doesn't have." If you can pray, you can make the impossible possible. All of a sudden you're not trying to work it out on your own. You've got God's power behind you.

VI. CONCLUSION

Who are the heroes going to be in heaven? The Billy Graham's of this world? The great Christian leaders? I don't think so. The heroes in heaven are the little, unknown people who prayed for the front men. The people who prayed for the superstars of Christianity. Because of their prayers God blessed those ministries because seemingly insignificant people prayed. Prayer is the most important thing you can do. D. L. Moody, a great pastor, once said, "Every great movement of God can be traced to a single praying, kneeling figure."

Our church needs to be a praying church. A praying church is a holy church, a committed church. When you pray it makes you sensitive to God and to other people. It sensitizes your life. A praying church is an enthusiastic church. We're excited. Churches that pray see miracles and that is exciting. We need some miracles in our church. Some of you need personal miracles: miracles in your marriages, miracles in your health. Some of you need a miracle in your jobs, your finances. A growing, praying church is a church that sees God act. God acts according to prayer. A praying church is a happy church. When you pray and get answers, your joy is full. There's nothing more fun than seeing answers to prayer. You get excited. It's contagious. People want to get involved.

Are you ready to let prayer change your life? What are you lacking in your life right now, simply because you've failed to ask God for it? Ask! He says, "Ask!"

Prayer the Great Adventure, Sermon 2

The Conditions of Answered Prayer

John 15:7

By Dr. Jim Pratt

I. Our Struggle

We struggle with understanding prayer. Danny Dutton, an eight-year-old from California has it all figured out. He says, "One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to put in place of the ones that die so that there will be enough people to take care of things here on earth. He doesn't make grownups. Just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that up to the mothers and fathers. I think it works out pretty good. God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, as some people, like preachers and things, pray other times besides bedtime.

"God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV on account of this. As He hears everything, not only prayers, there must be a terrible lot of noise in His ears, unless He has thought of a way to turn it off. God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere, which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time by going over your parents head and ask for something they said you could not have."

You have probably heard people say, "I tried prayer and it did not work. I had a need and prayed about it. After I had prayed for a while, nothing happened and I didn't see any results. I am disappointed and I do not believe in prayer." If we were honest, we would probably say that we have felt the same way at times.

Why is that? What causes that? Is prayer a farce, a superstition, something we just con ourselves into and pretend that it works when it really doesn't? What is prayer? There is a deeper question than that. Does God promise to answer everyone's prayers? The answer is yes, if the conditions are met.

II. What are the conditions for answered prayer?

A. You must have an honest relationship to God.

1. The verse we read at the beginning of the message gives us a beautiful promise. But in the Bible every promise has a condition, or every promise has a premise. The promise here is, "I will give you whatever you ask in prayer if you remain in me." In other words, "...if you have an honest relationship with me."

2. How do you remain in Christ? The next sentence tells us that we remain in Christ when his words remain in you. In other words, God says if we fill our minds with the Bible, the

Word of God, then we will be in Christ. We will be abiding in Him. God requires that we listen to Him first before He listens to us. If I do not pay attention to what God says to me in His Word, why should He pay attention to me when I talk to Him? If I ignore His Word, why should He pay attention to what I say to Him?

3. The starting point to having a relationship to God is the Word of God. That is why Bible study is important. Your prayer life will never be more effective than how much you understand Scripture. The more you understand the Bible the more you will know how to pray effectively.

4. I John 1:8-9 states, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (NIV). When we try to cover up things that we know are wrong from God, then that honest relationship is broken. There is a falseness, a con, a fraud, trying to live two different lives at once—live for God and live for myself. The first condition to answered prayer is this: Have an honest relationship to God.

B. You must have a forgiving attitude toward other people.

1. Mark 11:24-25 states, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (NIV).

2. The number one thing related to prayer is forgiveness. Every time Jesus talks about prayer, He talks about forgiveness. Why? Because nothing will kill your prayers faster than resentment. When you hold a grudge, when you nurse an ill feeling, when you allow bitterness to grow in your life, it knocks off your prayers. Maybe you are praying and you are not getting an answer because you are holding a grudge against somebody.

3. In Matthew 5, when Jesus is giving the Sermon on the Mount, He says when you go to church and you are going to offer a gift to the Lord and you remember you have got something against somebody or they have got something against you, stop, leave the gift right there at the church, go out, find that person, get forgiveness or offer forgiveness, make harmony in the relationship, then come back and continue giving your gift to the Lord. Why? Because God says you cannot say you love God and hate your brother.

C. You must be willing to share the results.

1. I John 3:21-23 states, "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus

Christ, and to love one another” (NIV). One of the ways we prove we love is by being generous with other people. God blesses us so we will bless others.

2. We are a channel. I would not presume to ask God to bless me financially if I were not willing to at least give back a portion of what He had blessed me with in a percentage, a tithe. You say, “I ask God for good health.” What are you going to do with that healthy body? Are you going to spend all the effort and energy on yourself, or are you willing to help other people? One of the conditions for answered prayer is to be willing to help those less fortunate with the blessings we are given.

3. God is not interested in simply satisfying our selfishness. The conditions of prayer are first, an honest relationship to God; second, a forgiving attitude toward other people; and third, a willingness to share God’s blessings with other people.

D. You must believe that God will answer.

1. James 1:5-8 states, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (NIV).

2. It is all about faith. What is faith? Is faith believing that God can do it? “I believe God can do it!” That is not faith. When you believe God CAN, that is just a fact. God can do it whether you believe it or not. “I believe God *MIGHT* do it.” That is not faith either. That is hope. You hope He might. “I believe God *WILL* do it.” That is faith. *Not believing God CAN do it, not believing God MIGHT do it, but believing God WILL do it.*

3. I believe if God actually answered some people’s prayers they would have a heart attack. An answered prayer! He probably has not answered some of them to keep them alive! We see so little in our lives because we expect so little in our lives. The Bible says, “According to your faith” not according to your ability, not according to your education, not according to how long you have been a Christian, not according to how good a person you are but “According to your faith.”

Have an honest relationship to God. No unforgiveness. Be willing to share the result. Believe that God will answer.

E. You must pray in Jesus’ name.

1. John 14:13-14 states, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (NIV).

2. What is so special about Jesus’ name? What does it mean when people end their prayers, “In Jesus’ name. Amen.”? I used to think it was a signal that the prayer was about to

end. Like a spiritual sign-off. The Walter Cronkite of prayer, "And that's the way it is." Some people think "In Jesus' name" is kind of a mystical password that gets you into God. Like the secret word. "Here are all my requests. By the way—code word: In Jesus' name." What does it mean to pray "In Jesus' name."?

3. A father took his son and 14 of the son's friends to the carnival for a birthday party. He bought a roll of tickets and through the evening he would stand at the beginning of each ride and as the kids came by he gave each of them a ticket. He was just handing them out. All of a sudden he looked up and realized that there was a little boy he did not recognize standing before him with his hand out asking for a ticket. He stopped and asked, "Are you with my son's party?" "No." "Why should I give you a ticket?" The young boy turned around and pointed to the man's son and said, "Your son said that you would give me one." So he gave him a ticket!

4. The point is this. I do not have any right to get any answered prayers from God. What makes me think my prayers should be answered? God does not owe me anything. I owe Him a lot, but He does not owe me anything. When I pray and ask God for requests, I do not ask on my own merit but I come on the merit of Christ. I come and say, "Father, I am coming to you because your Son said so. I am coming because of what Jesus has already done for me on the cross. He has promised I can ask in His name. God, I am coming in Jesus' name."

5. Is it always necessary to say the words, "In Jesus' name" at the end of every prayer? I do not think it is necessary if you have the right attitude, but I think it is a good idea. Why? Because it is a reminder of why we can pray. You do not have to say it at the end of the prayer, you could say it at the start. "Lord, Father, I am coming to you in Jesus' name." We are to pray to our heavenly Father, through His Son, Jesus."

III. Application

Which of these conditions have you been overlooking? Maybe you have been holding a grudge. Maybe you have been nursing resentment and you have allowed bitterness to build up in your life. It is no wonder you do not have any answers to prayer

Maybe you have been refusing to admit some wrong in your life. You have known it was there but you did not want to go to God and say, "You are right, God, I have been wrong. I admit it." Maybe you have prayed but you have never really expected God to answer. If you do not expect God to answer, you are just wasting your time.

Maybe you are unwilling to share God's blessing with other people. Maybe you are hesitant to give back to God a percentage of all the things with which He has been blessing you. You must be willing to share the benefits with other people.

Maybe you have not been abiding in Him. Abiding in His Word. Have you been praying in Jesus' name? You cannot pray in Jesus' name unless you know Him as a friend, as

your Lord, as your Savior, as the director of your life. The question is not “Do you have religion?” Instead the question is “Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ?” Jesus is the Way, the only way.

Prayer the Great Adventure, Sermon 3
How to Pray about Your Problems
Psalm 37:3-4; Romans 10:17
By Dr. Jim Pratt

I. Prayer and the Word of God

It is often said that faith is the key that unlocks the door, especially when that faith is expressed through prayer. Sometimes, however, the situation is so overwhelming and the problem so big that it is difficult to have faith. So, how do you gain faith in a faithless situation?

Romans 10:17 tells us where faith comes from: by listening to the Word of God. If you want to build faith, then you fill your life with the Bible. The more Bible knowledge and awareness you have, the more faith you are going to have. The less you know about the Bible, the less faith you are going to have.

How do you pray about problems and difficult decisions? In the Bible the keys to prayer are the promises of God. There are more than 7,000 promises in the Bible. They are like blank checks ready to be used or like gifts ready to be received. The Bible is such an amazing book that we can find a verse for every need; a passage for every problem. The more promises you know, the more powerful your prayers become.

Why is it, then, that the promises of God do not always seem to work? There is often a misconception that clouds our understanding of the promises. Many of the promises recorded in the Scripture have been given specifically to someone else and thus may or may not be given specifically to us.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. In the Greek there were two terms used for our English term “word”, *logos* and *rhema*. Whenever you read the phrase “the Word of God,” sometimes it is the *logos* of God and sometimes it is the *rhema* of God. The *logos* is the Word of God to everyone. That is the Bible—everything from Genesis to The Revelation, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Twenty-third Psalm. It is God’s word to everyone.

This is foundational to the second type of Word of God, which is *rhema*. The *rhema* is the word of God to you personally, a specific word, a promise, to a specific person in a specific period of time, for that time only. We can only claim a promise when it is a *rhema* to us, when it is the specific word to us.

Sara was Abraham’s wife. One day God came to Sarah and said, “Sarah, you are going to have a baby.” There is nothing unusual about that, except that she was 90 years old and her husband was 99 years old. That is incredible! It was a specific word to her. God did not say,

“For the whole nation of Israel, every woman will have a baby when she reaches the age of 90.” But this was a specific word to Sara, a *rhema*.

Have you ever been counseling with someone, talking with someone about a problem—maybe a friend or neighbor—and you begin to think *I wonder what I should say* when all of a sudden a Scripture verse pops into your mind? Just at the right time. Just exactly what you needed to say. How did that happen? God gave you a *rhema*. The Holy Spirit gave you a specific word, for a specific time, in a specific situation.

Have you every worried about a major decision or a problem or struggled with an issue when suddenly you remember something that was said in a sermon? It fits perfectly. It applies to this life situation. God has just given you a *rhema*. He spoke to you personally. Preaches love it when that happens!

This describes what happens to us when we become Christians. How many times did you hear, before you became a Christian, that God loves you? Some people hear that many times; and it is like water on a duck’s back, it just rolls off. Then one day, all of a sudden, God burns that truth into your life and you realize, “God loves ME” It changes your life. Suddenly God’s Word to everyone in general becomes very personal to you.

One of the results of getting a word of God, a personal promise of God, a personal *rhema* is that it builds tremendous faith in your life. It always produces faith. Faith comes by hearing the *rhema* of God, not the *logos* of God but the *rhema* of God. Faith comes from hearing God speak to you personally. All of a sudden you have confidence.

So then, how do you pray about a problem, a difficult decision? What do you do when you are in a situation and you do not know what to do? How do you know the will of God? You have to get a *rhema*. You have to receive a specific word from God. But how?

II. Praying about Problems: Action Steps

A. Confess the sin that is in your life.

You might do this by saying, “God, I do not want anything to block our relationship. Do I have any bad attitude? Am I doing anything you want me to stop doing? Have you been telling me to start doing something that I have not yet started?”

Stop. Get your life cleaned up, a kind of spiritual washing. I John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (NIV). Do not justify your sin. Just confess it, and make certain the channel is open to God.

B. Commit the decision to Christ.

Proverbs 3-5-6 states, "Trust in the Lord with all you heard and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (NIV).

Put yourself in neutral. That may take some effort and some time. Try saying, "God, about this problem I am facing or this decision, whatever you want is what I want." Put yourself in neutral, and keep praying until you can get that way about the situation. You might say, "Lord, whatever you want is fine with me. If you want it, I want it. If you do not want it, I do not want it." This attitude is the attitude that Jesus had in the Garden of Gethsemane before He went to the cross when He said "Not my will...but your will". It's OK to say, "I don't know what to do Lord. This is a difficult problem; I do not know what to do, so whatever you want, I want." Put yourself in neutral, and commit it to the Lord.

C. Ask God to reveal His will be giving you your desire.

Some people do not want to do this because they think that if they desire it, God must be against it. Some people think that if you desire it then God must not want it. That is not true. A lot of times God is in our desires. He can direct us toward God-controlled desires. Psalm 37:4 states, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (NIV).

How do you know if the desire is from God? One good test of a desire is time. One way you can tell if a desire is from God is to sit on it for a while and say, "God, if this desire is from you, make it stronger. If this desire is not from you, take it away." Ask God to do that. It is a legitimate request.

D. Compare your desires with Scripture.

Once you have a clear desire, start reading the Bible and see if your desire is in tune with what the Bible says. God never leads us contrary to the Bible. If my desire seems opposite to what the Bible says, I know my desire is not right. It could be called spiritual screening. If you do not know the Bible, how are you going to do that? That is why it is important to know the Scriptures. If you do not know the Scriptures, check your desires out with someone who will give you godly counsel.

James 3:17 states, "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (NIV). How do your desires match up with God's Word?

E. Listen for God to give you a personal promise.

Listen for God to speak to you. You do not just go to the Bible and pick out a promise at random. Listen for God. Prayerfully read the Word of God and wait for Him to speak to you. The *rhema*, personal word God gives you about your situation, will come in a variety of circumstances or ways (Bible reading, church worship service, conversations with others).

Psalms 46:10a states, "Be still, and know that I am God" (NIV). God speaks to the person willing to take the time to listen. If we are in a hurry, God says, "You have basically made the decision yourself." Are you willing to wait, to listen? Wait until God speaks to you. Do not get impatient. Listen for God to give you a personal word.

F. Claim the promise with confidence.

Claim it, believe it, know it is going to happen. You can pray very specifically. You can start thanking God in prayer because the promise is the answer. Start thinking Him. God gives you a promise to claim. It is just a matter of timing. God is never early, but He is never late!

II Corinthians 1:20 states, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (NIV). Claim the promises God gives you.

G. Move into action when God says, "Go."

Not when you think so, but when God says, "GO!" When God gives an idea, He gives it in three parts. First He says what He is going to do, then He says how He is going to do it, finally He gives you the timing by revealing when He is going to do it. The most frequent mistake people make is getting the first part of the idea and forgetting the other two parts. We do not know the timing, so we try to rush things. We begin to panic.

II Timothy 1:7 states, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline" (NIV). We do not have to feel like we are going crazy. God is working in our lives.

III. Application.

God wants to work in every one of our lives. That is *logos*. He wants to work in your life with a *rhema*. Does God still do miracles today? You better believe He does! But He does them in His way, according to His conditions, and according to His sovereign will. Some of you are facing difficult problems right now in your marriage, at work, at school, in other relationships.

How do you pray about your problems? First, confess any known sin in your life. Second, commit the decision you need to make to Christ. Third, ask God to reveal His will to you by giving you your desires. Fourth, compare your desires with Scripture. Fifth, listen for God to give you a personal promise, a *rhema*. Sixth, claim the promise with confidence. Seventh, move into action when, and only when, God says, "Go."

Have you asked God for help in dealing with your problems? If not, why not? If you have, then patiently wait on God to provide the answer to your problem.

Prayer the Great Adventure, Sermon 4

How to Receive An Answer From God

Luke 1:5-23

By Dr. Jim Pratt

I. The Situation

We have been talking about the power of prayer in our lives. The first week we talked about the four purposes of prayer. The second week we talked about the five conditions of prayer. Last week we talked about the six steps in dealing with prayer for a difficult situation or problem. Today I want to talk to you about how God answers prayer or “How to receive an answer from God.

I heard a story about a young girl who wrote a letter to a missionary. It was a prayer letter to tell him people were praying for him and that she was trying to lend her support to the missionary. Evidently she had been told not to request a response to her letter, because the missionaries were very busy. So the missionary got a kick out of her letter. It said, “Dear Mr. Missionary, we are praying for you. But we are not expecting an answer.”

I think that little girl summarized the prayer lives of most Christians. We do a lot of praying, but we do not expect an answer. Why doesn't God answer? How does God answer? We need four attitudes in order to receive an answer from God.

II. We must be willing to let God answer in His own time.

A. That means according to His schedule, His timetable. In other words, whenever God thinks it is best. The fact is, God often delays answers to prayers. He does not answer everything immediately. Why? Why does He wait? Why does He withhold the gift sometimes for a period of time? I think that is the reason Zechariah was so skeptical. Sometimes I have a hard time believing God is going to answer my prayers. But I believe if God sent a special delivery angel to meet me face to face and say, “I am here to tell you, God has answered your prayer.” I think that I would be convinced.

B. An angel came to Zechariah and told him his prayer was going to be answered. However, Zechariah was the ultimate skeptic. He said, “How can I be sure?” Why didn't he believe? Because he had stopped praying that prayer years before. If you read the passage casually it looks like he went into the temple. He prayed. And the angel came and said that his prayer had been answered. But the fact of the matter is, Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, had given up on this prayer years earlier. Zechariah said, “I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” (That is diplomacy on his part!) In essence he was saying, “We gave up on that prayer a long time ago.”

C. God answers our prayers immediately, but sometimes there is a delay in revealing His answer to us. He hears it immediately. There is no problem with time delays for prayer to get to God. It is there instantly. But sometimes He delays the giving of the answer, and that is one of the hardest things we have to learn.

D. Why does God delay? Because He usually wants to change us first. The fact of the matter is this: God is never late. His timing is perfect. We may think He is late, but He is never late. God's delays are not denials. "Not yet" does not mean "No." Isaiah 40:31 states, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (NIV).

III. We must be willing to let God answer in His own way.

A. Not only **whenever** He thinks best but **however** He thinks best. God's ways are always better and usually bigger when He answers. Psalm 25:4 states, "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths" (NIV). God says His ways are higher. The reason God often delays an answer to prayer is so He can answer in a way bigger than you originally thought.

B. What would have happened in the story we read if God would have answered Elizabeth and Zechariah's request for a baby immediately? What would they have received? A little Jewish baby. And they would have loved him or her. They would have cherished the baby, and it would have been great. But God delayed the request for a number of years; and then when He answered He gave them John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was like the announcer. He was the forerunner saying, "Here He is!" When God delayed the request, He did not just give them any old baby. He gave them John the Baptist.

C. God says, "Let me answer in my time and my way." You are praying for a job. You want to get this job change, and all of a sudden it falls through. Do not sweat it! God has a better idea. You are praying about a situation. All of a sudden, it does not work out. Do not worry about it. God has Plan B. Actually it is Plan A—yours is Plan B! Let God answer in His time and His way. Sometimes the worst thing in the world is for us to get our requests answered.

D. The prodigal son said, "Give me my inheritance!" He received it and it ruined him. The point is God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him. Let God answer in His time and let God answer in His way.

IV. We must be willing to let God answer in His own power, in His own ability.

A. Do not try to help God. Don't ask for it and then try to work it out on your own. Let God answer in His own power. That is called a miracle. There is an important truth in this story about Zechariah and Elizabeth. The fact is God often waits until the situation is humanly impossible before He answers. When did God give Zechariah and Elizabeth a baby? After they

were beyond childbearing years. They were physically unable to have kids. Then God answered. Why? Because when God answers an impossible situation, who gets all the credit? Who gets all the glory? It is a greater miracle.

B. The same thing happened to Sarah and Abraham. One day God came to Abraham and said, "You are going to be the father of a great nation." Abraham said, "I do not have any kids, but that is great!" So he waited and waited. Finally Abraham is 99 years old and still nothing has happened. In the meantime, he has decided to help God instead of letting God do it in His own power. So he has a child by another woman. God says, "That is not my plan!" So with Abraham at age 99 and His wife at 90, an angel comes to him and says, "Abraham, you are going to be a Father." Romans 4:3 states, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (NIV). He goes to his home and says, "Honey, you are never going to believe what I just heard. You are going to have a baby." That has got to be the first time in history that the man knew first. What was Sarah's reaction? She started laughing. We know she did not believe it, because she laughed. A 90-year-old woman who hears she is going to be pregnant would not laugh, she would cry if she believed it. She laughs. Then God gives a child. God waited until it was humanly impossible, hopeless, then He answered the prayer with a miracle.

C. Warning about prayer: If you start praying about something, particularly a problem, do not be surprised if it gets worse before it gets better. You are having problems in your marriage, you start praying, and your mate gets more hostile. Or you are praying about a financial problem, and all of a sudden it gets worse. Or you pray for somebody to get well, and they get sicker. Why does this happen? Because sometimes God lets things get to the point of hopelessness so He might gain the most glory out of it. Let God answer in His power.

D. When you are waiting for an answer to a prayer that has been delayed, keep your eyes open to watch God at work in other people's lives; it will build your faith. Do you want to have an answer from God? Be willing to let God answer in His own time. Be willing to let God answer in His own way. Be willing to let God answer in His own power.

V. We must be willing to let God answer for His own purpose.

A. Not only whenever He wants, however He wants, but also for whatever reason He chooses. Why does God answer prayer? What are His reasons? The entire Bible summarizes why God answers prayer in two statements: for our growth and for His glory. That is why God answers all prayer.

B. The greatest example of what I am trying to say can be seen in the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul was willing to let God answer his prayers in His own time, in His own way, in His own method, in His own power, for His own purpose. Romans 1:9-10 states, "God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I

remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you" (NIV).

C. Paul's desire, his ultimate goal, his dream was to preach in Rome. Did God answer his prayer? Yes. But notice how He did it. Acts 28:16 talks about the Apostle Paul when it says, "When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him" (NIV). Paul went as a prisoner to Rome. Paul prayed that he would have a prosperous journey. What kind of journey did he have? He was in a shipwreck, in chains, in the middle of winter; and he was bitten by a snake. It is not exactly your typical Mediterranean cruise. It is not our opinion of a relaxing way to Rome. He gets there as a prisoner and then is kept in house arrest.

D. Paul made it to Rome, but he was willing to let God arrange the timing and the travel in His way. He got there through Felix and Agrippa and Caesar—Roman leaders. God answered in His own time. Paul had a burning desire to go to Rome, but he did not get there until God said it was time. God answered Paul's prayer for God's purpose. Paul wanted to go to Rome to preach. Instead, while he was under house arrest, he wrote letters to different Christians all over the Mediterranean. Together, those letters make up most of the New Testament.

VI. Application

What about your prayer life? Do you have the right attitude toward prayer? Are you willing to let God answer your prayers in His way, anyway He sees fit? In His time, whenever He sees fit? Whatever way He thinks best? In His power? It may mean that things do not go as planned for a while, and they may get worse, so God can do a miracle when the situation becomes humanly impossible. Are you willing to let God answer your prayers for His purpose? What is His purpose? Your growth and His glory.

Why are you praying what you are praying? What is your motive? If you are praying for health, what are you going to do with that health in your body once you have it? If you are praying for financial freedom, what are you going to do with it? Will God get any glory out of it? Are you willing to let Him answer in His time, in His way, in His ability, for His purpose?

We can summarize the message this way. When you pray and the request is not right, God says, "No." When you pray and you are not right, God says, "Grow." When you pray and the timing is not right, God says, "Slow." When everything is in place, God says, "Go." He gives the green light, and you are able to move. What is God saying to you today? Are you listening?

30 DAYS OF PRAYER

“30 Days of Prayer” is a four-sermon series on prayer delivered by Dr. Chris Vaught to the congregation of the Cool Springs General Baptist Church in Morgantown, Kentucky. This congregation saw rapid growth during Pastor Vaught’s tenure growing from a stable, established country church to a thriving regional church drawing hundreds of people weekly from several cities and counties in south-central Kentucky.

A bulletin insert was produced to correspond to each of the sermons. The conclusion of each sermon contains the prayer and fasting emphasis for the particular week the sermon was preached. The front of each bulletin insert includes “Fasting Guidelines”. The backs offered specific suggestions for personal prayer. An opportunity for personal commitment is also included.

The titles for the weekly sermons have been kept very simple. Other preachers who use these concepts might choose titles that are more attractational while still using the basic framework so ably used by Dr. Vaught.

30 Days of Prayer, Sermon 1
Prayer for Deliverance
Sunday morning, September 5, 2010
Dr. Chris Vaught, Sr. Pastor

Acts 16: 16-34

I want you to imagine with me for just a few moments. You are walking down the street. You are overjoyed with the Spirit of God in your heart. You have been sharing Christ, people have been placing their faith in Jesus, and you are simply beside yourself with the Joy of the Lord! You are headed to a prayer meeting, and you are coming up on a stretch of the neighborhood where a young lady, a psychic, has her business; and she is not the least bit happy that you have been telling people about Christ. In fact, for days she has been mocking you when you walk down the street.

And just like the days before, as you approach her corner, there she is; and she begins to mock you. Your joy turns to frustration. A few minutes ago, you felt like you were walking on air; and now you feel like you have concrete in your shoes. Your laughter has turned to a sigh; and just then, without any warning or hesitation, you turn to her and say, "In the Name of Jesus, come out of her!" when before your very eyes you see this young lady's countenance change. The power of evil loses its hold on her life and she is set free!

But while you shout, "Hallelujah!", two big, burly men grab you from behind and take you to jail for disturbing the peace. They charge you with a "hate-crime" for pushing your views and values on the young lady.

Sound like a far-fetch story to you? It's not. It happened just like that to the Apostle Paul and his friend Silas and is recorded in the 16th chapter of Acts. And my friend, with the way this world is increasingly becoming hostile to the Christian faith, we very likely could see events like this unfold once again. This is a fact of life for many believers living in various parts of the world today!

Here is the question of the hour that I want you to answer. What would you do if that happened to you? Would you become depressed, discouraged, or fearful? Would you become angry? Perhaps you would be angry at the community, at the local police, at the government, or even at God?

How would you respond? Look with me at verse 25, and let's see how Paul and Silas reacted.

1. How Do You Respond at Midnight? v. 25

Some have said that midnight is more than simply when the clock strikes 12 a.m. It's when life comes to you in its darkest form.

– It's at midnight that fear begins to creep in. It's midnight when doubts begin to creep in.

And Paul and Silas are teaching us that at midnight, instead of ringing our hands in fret, we need to bend our knees in faith and pray for deliverance!

We have a God who specializes in delivering His people when they pray!

Quote: "Prayer is the only omnipotence God grants to us."

And once we have prayed in faith, we need to rise up and begin to praise Him for His mighty power!

Friends, listen, God moves when His people pray with faith and praise Him for His mighty power!

Quote: "Pray and believe and you will receive, pray and doubt and do without..."

2. God Can Shake the Very Foundations! Vs. 26

– This is why we pray: God can shake the very foundations! He is not limited to the physical world! Friend, He created the physical world!

It's time for us to pray and believe that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Creator of all things and that He and He alone has all power over every situation! What is your situation? How do you need God to move on your behalf? God is able!

Quote: "Prayer moves the hand that moves the world!"

Read this passage aloud with me, Psalm 146:5-10 (NKJV).

Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope is in the LORD his God, Who made heaven and earth, The sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever, Who executes justice for the oppressed, Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners. The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; The LORD raises those who are bowed down; The LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; But the way of the wicked He turns upside down. The LORD shall reign forever -- Your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!

Prayer is our greatest privilege, but far too often it is also our greatest failure. There are many wonderful things we can do, but there is no substitute for prayer!

3. God Is a God of Deliverance and He Wants to Use YOU! vv. 27-28

Read Rodney Walls' blog – August 25, 2010

Back at the beginning of this year, we challenged you to pray about what God would want you to give on our annual fundraiser Sunday. We announced that 10% of the giving that day would be a tithe set aside for missions and outreach. Because of your giving, over \$12,000 was able to be put aside as a tithe to go into mission works beyond our budgeted giving. In August, our Budget Team met and decided it was time to send some monies to various needs here in our community and around the world. The Budget Team presented to the church business meeting last month to send \$7,500 out to various missions. In the meeting, a burden was given to us that we wanted to send \$1,500 to Faith Home in Honduras so that another child could be released from the Honduran orphanage and be sent to Faith Home. We had no idea if that was even possible; however, it was our burden, and we announced it that way. One day after these precious children arrived at Faith Home, General Baptist Missions received our check for \$1,500. PRAISE THE LORD!

God already had these children in mind months ago and all He needed was for us to be obedient and watch Him deliver these precious children! PRAISE THE LORD! PRAISE THE LORD!

- A) God will use your financial blessings to deliver others when you are praying.
- B) God will also use your gifts and talents to deliver others when you are praying and surrendering to Him.
- We have children here every Wednesday night who need to be loved and taught the Word of God. Tonight there is a meeting at Pastor Harold's home concerning how you can assist these children. I know you are busy, but these children are worth a couple hours of your time each week. Counting the high school students, there were more than 80 youth here this past Wednesday night. We need more workers and teachers for our youth ministry.

Closing:

Friend, do you believe there is anything too hard for God? NO! All we need to do is to get our prayers, our faith, and our obedience in line with what we know about our God! HE IS ABLE!

John Wesley, a great preacher during the 18th century once said, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether

they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth. God does nothing but in answer to prayer.”

- Look at your 30 Days of Prayer Bulletin insert with this week’s prayer emphasis
- Altar of Prayer

This week pray in these areas.

- That God will unite all Christians in our Mission to guide people to faith in and devotion to Jesus Christ!
 - That God will fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory!
 - That God will guard our hearts and minds with His peace!
 - That God will bless those who preach and teach His Word.
 - That God will bless those who lead Children’s, Youth and Adult Ministries.
 - That God will bless the leaders in our Church.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one...” - Jesus – (John 17: 20)

This week I will fast by:

Prayer for Evangelism
Sunday morning, September 12, 2010
Dr. Chris Vaught, Sr. Pastor

Romans 10: 1-17

1. We are to Pray for Spiritually Lost People to Be Saved.

“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:1-4 NKJV).

Notice Paul’s prayer, he prayed that Israel would be saved. His desire was that they would receive Christ in their hearts, not simply in their minds. The orthodox Jew knew the Scriptures. The average Jewish child knew the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, by memory by age 12. However, they couldn’t recognize Jesus as God, though He fulfilled the Scriptures right before their eyes!

Let me give you an example. Turn to Genesis Chapter 15. Here is the discourse between God and Abram, called the Abrahamic Covenant. In verse 5, God tells Abram that his descendants will be like the stars of the heavens. That was amazing in and of itself because Abram, already an old man (probably around 85-86 years old) was childless. Then in verse 18, God says that Abram’s descendants would own the land from the river of Egypt to the River Euphrates. So God’s promise was that he would be blessed with countless descendants, and they would possess a great land.

It goes even further. Look at Chapter 22. In verses 17-18, God again reminds Abram of the blessing, but alludes even further. He says that through Abram’s seed (singular) all the nations will be blessed. That is a direct prophecy from God to Abram that the Messiah would come from his family lineage.

Now go back to Chapter 15. Abram asks God in verse 8, “...how shall I know that I will inherit it?” (NKJV). In other words, “How can I know what you are telling me is going to happen?” Then in verses 9-11 God and Abram begin a ceremony of a covenant that is still practiced by the nomadic groups in Israel to this day. These five specific animals are cut into two pieces and laid opposite one another so their blood will flow in between them into a pool.

Note, in any Hebrew covenant agreement there must be a greater and a lesser party. The greater party always goes first. That person steps into the pool of blood, stomps around in

it and says, "If I don't keep my promises, this is what you can do to me. You can cut my throat and stomp in my blood." Then, it's the lesser party's turn.

Now, look at verses 12-13. As Abram is getting ready to enter this covenant with God, great fear falls on him. Verse 12 says, "...great darkness fell upon him..." (NKJV). That is a Hebrew expression that means he was "scared to death." Why was he scared? He knew God could keep His end of the bargain, but he also knew that he and his descendants were human and would fail. God even told him in verse 13 that his descendants would not keep their end of the bargain.

Now look at verse 17, "And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces" (NKJV).

Remember the sequence of the covenant; the greater party goes first then the lesser party. God sent a smoking oven to represent Him, an all-consuming fire; and God entered the pool of blood, but, before Abram could step into the blood, God stepped back in as a flaming torch!

God knew Abram could not be perfect, so God took Abram's place in the covenant saying that if Abram's descendants fail in their part of the bargain, God would have to spill His own blood and man would trample in it!

Look at Hebrews 6:13, "For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (NKJV).

Fast-forward to about 30 A.D. Just outside of the gates of Jerusalem look at Golgotha. God, hanging on a cross, took the place of sinful man and shed His own blood; and to this day, men trample in it.

That is what Paul was saying in Romans 10: 3-4.

You simply cannot get this knowledge in your head. It must be caught in your heart!

2. Salvation Is Not Simply Learned, It Is Also Experienced!

Back in Romans 10. Look at verse 8-10

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (NKJV).

Our world has been greatly influenced by the actions of Alexander the Great. His lasting legacy was not how he conquered lands with military might, though he is believed to have been undefeated. He believed that he could change the world with four aspects of civilization: (1) education, (2) sports, (3) Theatre, and (4) religion.

Alexander was a Greek, and when he conquered a land he divided it into 40-acre sections and gave it to one of his generals. Each new city had a school, a sports arena, a theatre, and a temple for the Greek religion.

The Greek philosophy was to place the human experience on the top of the totem pole, to remove God and replace Him with the human experience. Today, that is called humanism.

The Greeks wanted to place the mind on the throne. It appears he did a pretty good job doesn't it?

Today, we think analytical, always in search of more knowledge. Paul warned of this way of thinking when he wrote to young Timothy about those who are "Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7 NKJV).

The Hebrew doesn't think that way.

Let's do something together, and I believe it will become clear.

In one word, define God.

****Holy, Almighty, Creator, Sovereign, Just, etc.***

Does Satan believe that?.... YES.

If you were to ask a Hebrew to define God, you would most likely hear,

****My Shield, My Rock, My Fortress, My Friend, My Father, My Lover of My Soul.***

The Hebrew thinks concretely, in pictures or symbols. The next time you are reading the Old Testament or the words of Jesus, notice how much of it is pictures and/or symbols.

And the Hebrew takes possession of the picture or symbol, "***My Shield, My Rock...***"

Question: Can Satan say that?....NO!!!!

And that is how Paul is saying we should pray for people to come to Christ.

- Pray that people receive not only the knowledge of Christ, but also experience Christ down deep in their hearts!
- Pray that people experience life-change, a heart transplant when they receive Christ! To possess Christ!

Listen to Paul's Words in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (NKJV).

3. Practical Steps for Us

A. We need to pray that people will hear the preaching of the Gospel: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (NKJV).

This is why inviting people to attend a Bible-preaching church is so important!

B. We need to pray that God will call people into the preaching ministry!

Romans 10: 15, " And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (NKJV).

C. We need to pray that God will use us to share our testimony and our faith with others.

Romans 10: 17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God " (NKJV).

Remember the woman at the well in John chapter 4. After she had an encounter with Jesus she went back into the city and told everyone who would listen what Jesus did for her!

John 4:29-30, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 Then they went out of the city and came to Him" (NKJV).

Invitation

- Look at this week's Prayer and Fasting handout
- Church Altar of Prayer

This week pray in these areas for Evangelism.

- That God would convict the hearts of those who are far from Him.
- That God will give you spontaneous opportunities to share Christ during your everyday activities.
- That God would burden your heart with specific persons that He is wanting you to share the Gospel of Salvation with.

- That God would bless the Church services with His presence, drawing the unsaved to Himself.

This week I will fast by:

Sunday morning, September 19, 2010

Dr. Chris Vaught, Sr. Pastor

John 17

Recently a book was published by The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc. entitled, *The Top Ten Events that Changed the World*.

After studying thousands of historical events, they announced a top ten list of those events that they felt impacted the whole world in a short amount of time. They are

1. The Cretaceous-Tertiary Extinction Event
2. The Black Death – The Bubonic Plague
3. The Boston Tea Party
4. The Mount Tambora Eruption
5. The Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand
6. Pearl Harbor
7. The Bombing of Hiroshima
8. The Moon Landing
9. The Fall of the Berlin Wall
10. September 11, 2001

All of these events have greatly impacted our world; but my friends, they have missed the No. 1 event that has changed the world. That event was a prayer offered to God Almighty by our Lord Jesus Christ nearly two-thousand years ago.

Today, I want to talk to you about the prayer that changed the world and is still changing the world.

Jesus loved His disciples, and He often prayed for them. Jesus knew the Father's will. He knew that His ministry would quickly end with His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension, but that the ministry would continue through His followers!

Jesus knew their weaknesses, their likes and dislikes. He knew the trials they would face, the temptations, even the persecution they would endure for His name. SO, Jesus prayed for them.

In Luke 22: 31-32, Jesus warns Simon Peter of severe testing he was about to endure. Can you imagine how the countenance of Peter fell when He heard Jesus tell him that He knew that Peter would deny the Lord? But to reassure Peter, Jesus said,

'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren' (Luke 22:31-32 NKJV).

What sweet words to Peter's ears, "I have prayed for you..."

The Bible says that, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV). Wouldn't it be a blessing to you to know that Jesus was praying for you, too? Well, He has,

Look at John 17:20, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (NKJV).

This means Jesus has prayed for us, and the prayer continues for everyone who believes on the name of Jesus for Salvation!

Why does Jesus pray for us?

1. Notice who we belong to. "They were Yours" (John 17:6 NKJV).
2. Notice, who we are entrusted to. "...to the men whom You have given Me..." (John 17:6 NKJV).
3. Notice, the focus of His prayer. "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours" (John 17:6 NKJV).

Jesus was not praying for the world. He was praying for those through whom the world would be reached! He was praying for us, the CHURCH!

We are God's plan for the world's redemption!

When you study the Gospels, you will find that Jesus was much more concerned with His disciples than He was for the world. This seems strange at first; but when you begin to understand that it is through His followers that Jesus changes the world and brings sinners to Himself, then it begins to make sense.

The redemption of the world depends on our faithfulness to live out and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. What a great responsibility. As believers, Paul said we died to our old selves and have put on Christ. He would also say that as Christians we are ambassadors for Christ. Our lives are not to be lived as those in the world. Our priorities in life are not to be materialistic, temporal, and fading. Our priorities are to become more like Jesus, in order that we may present Jesus to the world.

Let me show you an amazing Scripture in Romans 8:29-30.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn

among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (NKJV).

What is God's ultimate goal for you and your faith? Is it to go to heaven? No! Heaven is a wonderful blessing. It is a wonderful promise we have received, but that is not God's ultimate goal for us. His ultimate goal for a Christian is to be conformed to be like Jesus!

One day Philip came to Jesus and said, "Lord, show us the Father..." Jesus answered; "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14: 8-9 NIV).

God wants us to be transformed into the very image of His Son so that when people see us, they see Jesus.

It has been said, "**You may be the only Bible some people ever read.**" In truth, you may be the only example of Jesus some people ever see!

That is why Jesus prays the prayer of John 17.

1. Jesus prays for our Endurance. vv. 11-13

2. Jesus prays for us to have His Joy! v. 14

Joy and happiness are two different things. Happiness is an emotion that is fleeting, but joy is state of your heart that remains no matter the temporary events and feelings one is going through.

The Bible says that the "Joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

3. Jesus prays for our Protection. vv. 15-16

Remember, when the battle gets heavy we have a hiding place to run to in Jesus.

Psalm 32:7. "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" (NIV).

4. Jesus prays for our Spiritual Maturity. vv. 17

1 Peter 2:2, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby"(NKJV).

2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV)

5. Jesus prays for us to Fulfill our Mission! vv. 18

Illustration: *Houston Chronicle* displayed a picture of a woman with her ear to a man's chest. She was listening to his heartbeat. She was listening to the heartbeat of her son. When God puts His ear to your chest, does He hear the heartbeat of His Son?

6. Jesus prays that one day we may unite with Him in His Glory! vv. 24-26

One day, we will join that number that cannot be numbered and gather at the throne of God. There, we will see the glory of our Savior in its fullness. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Conclusion: Lyrics, "What a Day that Will Be."

This week pray in these areas.

- That God will unite all Christians in our Mission to guide people to faith in and devotion to Jesus Christ.
- That God will fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory!
- That God will guard our hearts and minds with His peace!
- That God will bless those who preach and teach His Word.
- That God will bless those who lead Children's, Youth and Adult Ministries.
- That God will bless the leaders in our Church.

This week I will fast by:

Sunday morning, September 25, 2010

Dr. Chris Vaught, Sr. Pastor

Ezekiel 37: 1-12

Story of song, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

The year was 1758, and following the tradition of ministers of his day, Robert Robinson wrote a hymn-poem for the conclusion of his sermon on Whitsunday. The hymn he wrote was "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." He was 23 years old at the time. It was published the following year in *A Collection of Hymns used by the Church of Christ in Angel Alley, Bishopsgate* (1759).

In stanza 3, Robinson speaks of being "Prone to wander,... prone to leave the God I love". This seems to be a forecast of his later life, when he lapsed into sin, instability, and involvement with Unitarianism.

One day, Robinson boarded a stagecoach. The only other passenger was a lady who was deeply engrossed in a hymnbook. She came across a certain hymn and began to hum it.

Robinson began to be disturbed. In an attempt to encourage him, she asked him what he thought of that particular hymn.

You guessed it, she was humming and reading "*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.*" Robinson burst into tears and said, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then."

Have you ever felt like Robert Robinson, dry, dead on the inside?

Today we turn our Bibles to Ezekiel Chapter 37 where we will find an unusual and amazing story. God takes the prophet to a vast, open graveyard and teaches him and us about Revival.

1. The Condition of God's People vv. 1-3

Spiritually, not physically, the people of God were dead, dried up.

- **Dry Bones** – "very dry." They had been dead for a long time. They were dried by the sun and the wind.
- **Scattered** – Dried by the heat of the sun and blown by the wind, the valley lay with dried up, scattered bones.

- **Numerous** – “full of bones,” “there were very many” When you stand in a valley that is full of dry bones you get a feeling of hopelessness, that nothing will ever be right again!

- a. **Why where the Bones dry?**

- i. **Because of selfish living, sin, and rebellion**

Listen to God’s warning in Deuteronomy 30:15-19

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live (NIV).

God gave His people this promise. A promise to bless them if they would love Him and serve Him, but He also gave them a warning, that death and curses await for those who live selfishly and sinfully.

- ii. **Because of Trials and Tribulations**

Ezekiel is not only a prophet, he is also a priest. His father, Buzi, was a priest. Ezekiel trained from an early age to serve God and the people of God in Solomon’s Temple. But at the age of 25, he was carried away captive with King Jehoiachin and other Jews to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar.

When we begin reading the Book of Ezekiel Chapter 1, verse 1, says, “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar,...” (NKJV).

Here is what is fascinating. This would have been around 594 B.C. Not only is this the 30th year of the beginning of the Babylonian Empire, but it is also the year that Ezekiel turned 30 years old. Why is that important, you ask? Because a young man in training to be a priest, actually began his priesthood at 30 years of age.

Now, put it together. Ezekiel is most likely sitting on the river bank, depressed, because he knows that everything he has worked for, prayed for, and dreamed of was supposed to

begin on his 30th birthday, But instead of being a priest in the Temple of God, he sits on a river bank as a slave to Babylon! His bones were dry!

iii. Because of Weariness

Sometimes we become weary and dry when we are doing good. We can become dry when we are going to church, reading our Bibles, saying our prayers, even serving in ministry.

The prophet Jeremiah experienced this, "LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, "Violence and plunder!" because the word of the LORD was made to me a reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name" (Jeremiah 20: 7-9 NKJV).

b. How do we know when our Bones are dry?

1. When you lose your desire for Bible study and prayer.
2. When spiritual conversation embarrasses you or is avoided.
3. When you rationalize sin.
4. When you can quote Scripture and attend service, but it doesn't make a difference in your life.
5. When you life revolves around money.
6. When it no longer bothers you that others are in misery and spiritually lost.
7. When worship and service to God does not excite you.

c. Is there any hope? v. 3

YES!

Revival Comes When God Speaks! Vs. 4-6

- When God speaks, worlds are created!
- When God speaks, light shines in the darkness!
- When God speaks, blinded eyes are opened!
- When God speaks, deaf ears hear!
- When God speaks, the lame walk!
- When God speaks, sadness gives way to Joy!
- When God speaks, weeping and mourning turn to laughter!
- When God speaks, hate is replaced with love!
- When God speaks, grudges are forgiven!

- When God speaks, Hope replaces Despair!
- When God speaks, sinners repent!
- When God speaks, miracles happen!

Jesus cried out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke 8:8 NIV).

d. When Does God Speak?

i. When we Humble ourselves

1 Peter 5:5-7, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (NKJV).

Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (NKJV).

ii. When we Repent

Psalms 51:1-2, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (NKJV).

Psalms 51:12-13, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You" (NKJV).

iii. When we are Desperate for Him

In Matthew 15, a Canaanite woman, a Gentile, comes to Jesus and asks Him to heal her daughter. Jesus refuses and says that He was not sent to the Gentiles, just the Jews. "And she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour" (Matthew 15:27-28 NKJV).

Jesus wasn't trying to be mean-spirited toward this woman. He just wanted to teach us that sometimes God doesn't move on our situation until we are desperate for Him.

e. But There Is More... vv. 7-8

The bones had come back together, the flesh and skin had returned, but the bodies were still lifeless! You see, revival comes in two parts. The first part is the Word of God; the second is the Spirit of God!

2. Revival Comes When the Holy Spirit Blows! v. 9

They looked alive, but they were not. It reminds me of those spoken of as "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5 NKJV). These were still only bodies--they were not living beings. There was a multitude there in the valley, but they were still dead! And they stayed that way until touched by the Spirit of God.

May I tell you that all our efforts in the Kingdom are lifeless and powerless without the touch of the Spirit upon them. All our programs, all our projects, all our promotional, all our proddings, all our proclamation are dead until energized by the Spirit of God! Of a certainty we can sing:

Come, Holy Spirit we need thee
Come, sweet Spirit I pray
Come in thy strength and thy power
Come in thine own special way!

We need God to "***breathe***" on us! The breath of God in the Scriptures refers to God's Spirit. Adam was a lifeless being until God breathed into his nostrils, and then man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7)!

In Acts 2, the disciples of Christ were assembled in body, but they were afraid and powerless to go into the highways and hedges and compel people to come to Christ. That was until a rushing mighty wind blew in that upper room (Acts 2)!

3. The Promise of Revival vv. 10-11

"...and they lived..." (v. 10 NKJV); "...and you shall live..." (v. 5 NKJV)

Earlier we briefly looked at Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's dry moments.

Remember how Jeremiah said that he would not preach anymore? Listen to the rest of verse 9 of Jeremiah 20, "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (NKJV).

Do you remember a depressed Ezekiel sitting on the river bank wishing he were back in Jerusalem so he could become a priest for God? Listen to what God did while he was sitting there, "...the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God...the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there" (Ezekiel 1: 1, 3 NKJV).

I believe God waited until he was 30 years of age and said to him, "Ezekiel, you are dry because you thought you couldn't be my priest outside of Jerusalem, but not only will you be my priest, you will be my prophet!"

Closing:

When God speaks and sends His Holy Spirit to blow on us, it doesn't matter how dry our bones may be, WE WILL HAVE REVIVAL!!!

w. 11-12

Invitation and Prayer

This week pray for Revival in these areas.

- For us as believers to experience true Revival in our hearts.
- For our church to experience true Revival in our love for God, for each other and a passion to fulfill our mission.
- For God to remove a sense of apathy that many Christians and churches are experiencing in their service to Christ.
- For a Revival to sweep across this Nation. For a call to repentance and a return to holiness.
- For Revival to sweep across the Earth, igniting Christians to fully surrender to Christ, for men and women to rise up and accept God's calling into ministry, for sinners to be convicted of sin and receive God's forgiveness.

This week I will fast by:

APPEAL

"Appeal" is a four-part sermon series prepared and delivered by Pastor Terrell Somerville of the Freedom Church in Gallatin, Tennessee. The Freedom Church is a young church, and Pastor Terrel is the lead pastor there having previously served the church as church planter and founding pastor.

The Freedom Church attracts several hundred people to its three weekend worship services. Many of these folks are new believers. Many of them are also newly connected to a local church since they were formerly de-churched.

While Pastor Somerville teaching outlines are rather brief in content, the experienced preacher can read between the lines to understand the concept he is attempting to convey. Since he is dealing with a relatively young congregation, the pastor has chosen to use the basic teaching technique of an acrostic in most of his sermons. Thus the key word or concept for the message is broken into its component letters to provide the first letters of descriptive words used to expound the message. Even when the illustrations are incomplete on the page (although they were fresh and complete in the mind of Pastor Somerville) the alliteration used can become a helpful tool when the concept is re-preached by others.

The basic discipleship themes of prayer are made into a more attractational preaching series by using the concept from the legal system of an appeal. This packaging quickly gives way, however, to solid biblical preaching dealing with several aspects of prayer.

Appeal: When You Pray part 1
July 19 & 20, 2008
Pastor Terrel Somerville
Freedom Church, Gallatin, Tennessee

WELCOME!

Preview new series on Prayer.

Define Appeal from the legal realm and apply it to our spiritual life.

Appeal then becomes a transfer of my case, my issues, my problems to God.

Two focal passages will guide us:

1 Thess. 5: 17 “Never stop praying.”- live with an attitude of prayer – praying frequently with a whole hearted confidence that God hears and answers

Colossians 4: 2 “Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”

Have you ever devoted yourself to prayer so that you actually became physically tired from the effort?

Our persistence is an expression of faith that God answers our prayers. God is always listening and always answering, not necessarily in our timing but in his.

Throughout this series we’ll talk about many facets of prayer. Here’s a challenge. Maybe you have questions about prayer.

Some of those questions can probably be answered in this series, if you will ask them. So why not write them on your communication card or send an e-mail so we address them.

What is Prayer? Very simply it is **COMMUNICATING WITH GOD**

Let’s think about communication then and today.

In olden days communication was often by smoke signals or signal fires. Letters were once very rare but have been popular for generations and of course face-to-face has always been preferred.

In more recent generations the telegraph has given way to the telephone and the cell phone with the internet, and social media like text messaging not in the forefront of our means of communication.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you heard about Deepak Sharma? Deepak Sharma went on record with the Guinness Book for having sent the most SMS messages in a single month: 182,689.

Let me break that down for you, that's about 6,100 messages a day, 253 an hour, 4.2 a minute, or a new one every 14 seconds or so.

So basically this guy gave up a month of his life sending texts—way to go, dude.

His other reward? A 1,411 page bill but don't worry, he has an unlimited texting plan!

You know we could be up on technology, but be down in our intimate relationships due to superficial communication.

The great philosopher from India, Mahatma Gandhi, said "Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action."

To communicate with God is to share my thoughts, my feeling, my life, and ultimately my entire heart with God.

Time Magazine reported a study done by Dr. Elizabeth Targ as she studies the therapeutic effects of prayer on AIDS and cancer patients by examining the effects of the presence of a compassionate person reciting soothing prayers. She is investigating what she calls "distance healing," in which those offering the prayers are far removed from the patients, who themselves are not even aware that incantations are being recited on their behalf.

In the study, she selected practicing healers, she supplied them with the first names, blood counts and photographs of 20 patients with advanced AIDS. For an hour a day, over a ten-week period, the healers concentrated their thoughts on the pictures of these patients, but not on those of a control group of 20 other AIDS patients.

According to Targ, the prayed-for patients had fewer and less severe new illnesses, fewer doctor visits, fewer hospitalizations and were generally in better moods than those in the control group. The technique, she believes, can even work on nonhuman species.

In a speech, she described an experiment performed by another group in which remote healing was used to shrink tumors in mice. And, she reported, the greater the distance between healer and mouse in that experiment, the greater the effect!

The connection, Targ suggests, "could be actuated through the agency of God, consciousness, love, electrons or a combination."

Jesus Teaching On Prayer Matthew 6: 5 ~ 13

There is POWER IN PRAYER when I.....

P RIORITIZE prayer to prove God exists.

Do you make prayer priority? When you see someone pray over a meal,

DO you just assume that they must believe that God exists?

90% of Americans believe that God exists.

50% of those say they pray on a regular basis.

You what's amazing though? Even those who say they don't believe in God often pray when tragedy strikes. Those who deny the existence of God, may be the first to offer prayer to God when tragedy comes.

Matt. 6:5 “When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.”

The religious leaders here wanted to appear holy in the public setting to gain the attention of the crowd. Don’t we all like to get attention?

Jesus saw right through their self righteous acts. There is a place for public prayers but if you are praying for others to notice your real audience is not God. Jesus, himself, practiced both public and private praying. The motive behind the prayers, not the presence or absence of other people is the real issue.

You may be present today but you really don’t believe God is up there ready to hear our prayers. Deep inside of us we all really do believe there is more to this life than just what we see. Here in our church we try to create a safe environment, where people who do not believe in God can come and check it out. Maybe that’s you today. I’M GLAD YOU ARE HERE!

Maybe you are wondering—is God real? Maybe you aren’t sure.

I hope you will stay with me over the NEXT FEW WEEKS

Many of you believe God exists but you feel a little far from him right now. Maybe you are in a dry season of life. This series is for you

R ECONNECT with my Heavenly Father by positioning myself for prayer.

In the Old Testament God made Himself known through the Prophets and the Law, but it was impossible prior to Jesus, for people to individually connect with God.

But Jesus came as God and human. He brought God and humanity together. You might visualize it like this. When Jesus was on the cross, one hand reached up to God, and one hand reached out to us. So Jesus is our connection to God.

Jesus started the process for you and me to have friendship and an ongoing relationship with God.

Notice Reconnect Prayer is not our initial connection with God. Our initial connection with God comes through a faith relationship in Jesus Christ that leads us to follow Jesus. When you decide that Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection on the cross is sufficient to forgive all of your sins and to bring you into a connection with your heavenly Father, that’s the connecting point. But then maintaining that connection with God, comes through this conversation with God called prayer. And that’s reconnecting.

Matt. 6: 6 But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

The prayers you pray in private will be the power you receive while living life in the public forum.

For many people the term “father” is a negative term. It brings up all kinds of bad memories. They think of disappointment, resentment, anger. Because some human fathers make their homes a hell on earth. Many fathers are distant, distracted, uninvolved, abusive.

So people think “If God is like my father, no thanks, God!”

If you grew up with an unreliable father, you’re going to tend to think God is unreliable.

In America, 24 million children live in a home without a father. What kind of image are they getting of God?

You can trade in all your misconceptions about God for the truth. My prayer is that you would trade in all your sorrows, sadness and all your shame that you got from human fathers and trade them for the joy of the Lord because when you really know God as Father it’s going to make a difference.

A CKNOWLEDGE my need for God.

Prayer is not about showing that God is available to you. It’s about showing that you are available to God. Say, God, I am available for You to work in my life.

I am available for You to do Your will in my life.

Matt. 5: 7-8 “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!”

ILLUS. Have you ever heard someone engage in a kind of prayer babbling? Maybe they just repeated phrases and sentences fragments over and over again so that it was difficult to understand what they were saying.

If God already knows what we need, if He already knows our secrets, why does He want us to pray in the first place? WE’RE NOT praying for God’s sake BUT for our sake.

Prayer was not invented for God. Prayer was invented for us. It is acknowledging our need by saying, “God, I need You in my life”. God already knows you need Him, but God will not move in your life until you open the door and allow Him.

Matt. 7: 7 “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

Asking Seeking Knocking

YIELD my will to God's will.

The ultimate action of prayer is for you to adjust your will to God's will.

How many of you are very familiar with the Lord's Prayer?

Matthew 6: 9-13 (NIV) "This, then, is how you should pray:

" Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

What area of your life do you need to yield to God's will? What have you been holding back from Christ? Do you need to be baptized, become a member of the church, start serving, start bringing the tithe, begin praying for your family and friends? Do you need to pray for the people around you to come to Christ?

Before Jesus went to the cross he prayed:

Mark 14: 36 (CEV) *Father, you can do anything. Don't make me suffer by having me drink from this cup. But do what you want, and not what I want.*

PRAYER

Appeal: Praying for Myself Part 2

July 26, 27 2008

Pastor Terrel Somerville

Freedom Church, Gallatin, Tennessee

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Some of those questions can probably be answered in this series, if you will ask them. So why not write them on your communication card or send an e-mail so we address them.

Last week we explored *What is Prayer?* and concluded that it is COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

If you have ever flown you will recognize the protocol described by the flight attendants at the beginning of every flight. In the event the oxygen masks drop from their compartments you are instructed to first take yours and secure it in place. Then you are to assist those around you if they are in need of assistance. This may seem selfish and self-serving. In fact should the plane loose cabin pressure it is entirely possible that you would become unconscious while assisting others. Unless you put on your oxygen mask first neither you nor those around you may find rescue.

When Jesus faced going to the cross, the most excruciating form of death known, we see him in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is in great anguish as he anticipates the physical pain of crucifixion along with the mental and spiritual and emotional pain of separation from his Father as he began to take on the guild of the sins of the world.

The prayers he prayed that evening were not rebellious. He reaffirmed his desire to do God's will. What does it take to say "I want your will to be done"? How can we gain the courage to trust God's plan and follow obediently every step of life?

Matt. 26: 41 Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

Many people have described this struggle as a kind of warfare as they look at either the struggle within ourselves or the struggle with evil forces that would lead us astray.

Jesus warned people of temptations he would soon face. How does anyone overcome temptation? Keep alert and pray. Temptations strikes when we are most vulnerable and none of us can resist it alone. Prayer is essential because God's strength can shore up our defenses and defeat our spiritual enemies.

None of us can be effective for God unless we pray for ourselves to be in line with his will and his direction.

Today I have four chairs placed here to represent four different conditions or circumstances that we might find ourselves in.

- 1st Chair "IN LOVE" WITH GOD

Jesus wants you in this chair. All of you are in one of these chairs

This first chair is one of love where we pray, seek God daily and allow God to write on the pages of your heart.

All of us probably realize that romantic love is often blind. Having found that perfect life partner we often discover in those first months of marriage that we have habits that irritate our new partner. For those of us who manage to stay married we generally find that for the sake of love we change some of those habits. Guys learn that clothes need to get picked up and put in the laundry hamper and gals often learn that it is OK to let him channel surf with the remote during commercials.

John 14: 21 "Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them."

What do you do that shows you are in love with God? How do you accept and obey and change for the One you love?

2 Timothy 3: 12 "Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

That's how you can tell if you are in the 1st chair or not. When you are really in love, love is really blind and love is really willing to pay any price. Someone who is in love cannot be convinced that the price is too high or that the task is unrealistic. Are you really in love with God?

You might protest that you don't really want to be in the first chair because that is radical, abnormal. But it isn't radical and abnormal it has been the normal spiritual life of believers throughout the ages

John 16: 31-33 "Jesus asked, 'Do you finally believe? But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.'"

When I am in love with God and I live in a world that is predominantly not in love with him, I can expect some tension. As Christ followers you can expect trials in an unbelieving world that is out of sync with Christ, his good name and His people. At the same time, however, we can expect our relationship with Christ to produce peace and comfort as we pray to him to keep us in obedience because we're in love and in sync with Him.

- 2nd Chair GOTTEN USE TO GOD - This is a dangerous chair

It could be that we have been raised in church and become complacent. Unfortunately this seat often rules and governs the local church. It is easy to be more concerned with rules of right living than with a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Instead of being alert and praying, the flesh and the body begins to take over.

There are two evil things folks in this chair do. They often sleep through the worship service and during short bouts of wakefulness they watch the clock.

They seldom pray for godly repentance. They are professional Christians who used to be on fire for God but their fire has burned low. The folks in the first chair have been saved and just don't know any better than to be on fire but those in the second chair have found a way to get over that first drive and passion of salvation.

Long years ago Jesus himself described those folks in the second chair.

Rev. 2: 2-4 "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently

suffered for me without quitting. 4 “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!”

A new Christian is often enthusiastic without knowledge. But those in the second chair have knowledge without enthusiasm.

Do you now have knowledge without enthusiasm? It takes both to stay in love with God.

Marriages that last require communication, work and dedication.

Look at I Peter 3:7 “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

Notice that prayers are not heard because our relationship with God depends on right relationships with others.

Have you just gotten used to your spouse? Have you just gotten used to God? Are you just going through the motions of a relationship with him because you are not excited about him anymore? Have you ever thought about who moved? Not him!

- 3rd Chair MAKES GOD SICK

Rev. 3: 15-16 “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

This is a picture of believers who did not take a stand for anything. Their indifference led to idleness. Being half-hearted and self-sufficient indirectly sends a message to God that you no longer need him.

Folks in this chair are so focused on others that they cannot see their own faults any longer and fall prey to TRYING TO TAKE GOD’S PLACE

Matt. 7: 1-5 “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

Jesus says to examine our own motives and conduct instead of judging others. Do you find it easy to magnify others faults while ignoring your own?

Do you see the humor of Jesus' illustration? Take the 2x4 out of your eye then you can get the speck of sawdust out of someone else's!

Think about it. When I look down the row of chairs I only see the one just in front of me. The third chair blocks the view of the second and first ones. The second chair blocks the view of the first one.

MATT. 7: 21 Says, "Not everyone who calls out to me, Lord!, Lord! Will enter the Kingdom of heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father will enter."

- 4th Chair NOT A CHRISTIAN

These folks are just watching. They see the third chair and may get a little glimpse of the second chair but know nothing of what it would be like to be in the first chair.

1 John 5: 11-15 And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for.

Being a Christian isn't based on church attendance, church role, being good, having Christian parents, owning a Bible, etc. Being a Christian starts when you pray for and ask for personal salvation and then by living a life that will be a light for others to want the salvation you have.

GOOD QUESTION: WHAT CHAIR ARE YOU IN?

GREAT QUESTION: WHAT CHAIR DO YOU WANT TO BE IN?

Appeal: Listening to God Part 3
August 2, 3 2008
Pastor Terrel Somerville

Freedom Church, Gallatin, Tennessee

Welcome!

If 1st time, I'm Terrell Somerville, Lead Pastor Freedom church

How many of you grew up being accused of being a big mouth?

All of us at one time or another can find ourselves labeled Attention Deficit Disorder. Whether we have all the classic symptoms of ADD or not all of us at times get so busy or so distracted that we can't hear those around us.

It has often been pointed out that we have two ears and one mouth with the result that we should listen a whole lot more than we speak.

It's hard to listen today, isn't it?

In our current sermon series we have explored *What is Prayer?* And have defined it as communicating with God. But sometimes we do all the talking! We have looked at how to pray and praying for myself. This weekend we will explore listening to God.

Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God..."

It's hard to be still in our world. Fast food restaurants and convenience stores and even major retailers are all open 24/7. News channels, local programming and Netflix make it possible to watch something 24/7. We run all the time.

Do you want to know God? Do you want to know God better? We are made like God, in His image, but we don't always act like God and until we know him better we can't act like someone we don't yet know.

God has a great benefit package in knowing him and we discover it by being still.

Being Still Means:

- **S PEND Time With God Everyday**

You cannot hear someone you do not spend time with

Psalm 143:8 (CEV) "Each morning let me learn more about your love because I trust you. I come to you in prayer, asking for your guidance."

God's word is God's heart to you.

Mark 1:35 “Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.”

The first hour of the day is important. We set the tone, established the framework and organize our plans for the day early.

ILLUS. MY TIME WITH GOD IN THE MORNING

John 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

Prayer and a Bible Reading Plan so we can systematically read God’s love letter to us.

We can make Bibles and a Bible reading plan available for your use.

How has God spoken to you lately? We can be spiritually dry and empty but time spend with Him in a daily quiet time can reverse that difficult trend.

• **T HANK God For Everything**

Psalm 100:4 “Enter His gates with thanksgiving; go into His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and praise His name.”

Can you think of ways to praise Him?

If we’re not careful, we’ll get into a religious rut where we take God for granted and where we assume the body language of prayer, show up at church out of habit, sing the same songs we’ve always known but forget to praise God with our entire being and thank him for all his blessings.

Ephesians 5:20 “And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

• **I NSPECT God’s Many Ways Of Influence**

There are many spiritual influences in our world and it is easy to get blinded by them and to become cynical. To get caught up in horoscopes and ungodly activity that will not bring us closer to God but only farther away from Him.

MOVIE CLIP: BRUCE ALMIGHTY PART 1

Romans 1:19-20 “They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God has made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.”

God can speak to us through nature.

God can speak to us through people. Those people God has placed in your life, in your church, in your small groups, through your pastors, Christian friends.

God can speak to us through our daily quiet time, your daily Bible readings and your conversations with Him.

Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.”

ILLUS. The proverbial midnight activity of Snipe Hunting allows gullible followers to go on an impossible task aided and abetted by those who know well in advance that the joke is always on the one holding the bag!

God’s Word is a guide for us not to stumble over but to reveal the entangling roots of false values and philosophies. When you study the Bible you will see clearly how to stay on the right path.

- **L EAVE The Noise**

Have you ever noticed the noise that surrounds us? Cell phones, TV, radio, background music, traffic, voices in the street, and you could add to the list, the world is jammin’ out loud!

Mark 6:31-32 “Then Jesus said, ‘Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.’ He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat. So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone.”

Ever found yourself running from place to place, appointment to appointment and not even finding time for a meal? Vacate it all for just a little while each day to refuel.

- **L EARN To Say Yes To God**

Some people just have a way of asking so that we have a hard time saying “No” to them. We call them salesmen!

Sometimes the opposite is true with God when we have a hard time saying “Yes” to Him.

1. We think we know what is best for ourselves.
2. We are frightened of what God may ask us to do.

God can’t speak to a closed mind and a heart of stone.

God speaks to us through:

1. Impressions to our spirit
2. Insights from the Bible that seem to jump off the pages
3. Promptings to active service, a kind of compulsion to act and to do
4. Callings on our lives

I've experienced this calling when I knew that I needed to become a Christian, to become a preacher and to come to this church. Has God called you?

God can't speak to you when sin dominates your life. It block us from hearing God.

We often run away from God not knowing that He has something great in store for us. We can't hear it, receive, it, believe it and reap the benefits from it.

When we have sin in our lives we don't even what to talk to God, let alone allow Him to speak to us.

Parents learn to recognize when children have done something wrong. It gets too quiet or the conversation gets re-directed.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.9 For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

God knows what is best for each of us if we will just learn to say yes even before he speaks into our lives. I could keep from causing us a lot of heartache

MOVIE CLIP: BRUCE ALMIGHTY PART 1

END VIDEO AFTER HEART SHOCK BACK TO LIFE ON EARTH

Romans 8:28 "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."

BOW YOUR HEADS

BAND COMES TO STAGE BUT DOES NOT PLAY

CONFESS – MEANS TO AGREE WITH GOD

FORSAKE ALL FOR HIM

RECEIVE FORGIVENESS

We're often afraid of yes, but God knows best. Is God calling you to become a Christian today? Do you need to give him those things that block you from hearing his will for your life?

Ask God, do you want me to turn my life over to you today?

SILENCE – 30 SECONDS

PRAYER

MY NEXT STEP TODAY IS TO:

- . Memorize Psalm 46:10.
- . Begin 10 minute daily quiet time this week and practice listening to God.

Appeal: Praying for Others Part 4
August 9, 10 2008
Pastor Terrel Somerville

Freedom Church, Gallatin, Tennessee

WELCOME - STORY ABOUT TRAVELING THIS WEEK

RECAP SERIES

CD SERIES WILL BE AVAILABLE AT THE SOURCE

COMMENT CONNECTING WITH GOD ONLY THROUGH CHRIST

MAKING INTERCESSION JESUS IS BATTING FOR US –

ILLUS. LOST OUR POWER CONNECTION IN THE PARLOR

WHEN YOU MAKE THE CONNECTION, THEN THAT OPENS UPS YOUR FULL ACCESS TO GODS THRONE FOR POWER

WHEN WE TEAM UP TOGETHER AS A CHURCH FAMILY – COMMENT

OUR PURPOSE: LOVING GOD-LOVING OTHERS-SERVING THE WORLD

ONE SAVIOUR – ONE CHURCH – ONE WORLD

2 Timothy 1:3b “...Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.”

CONSISTENTLY PRAYING FOR OTHERS

FAMILY - EACH OTHER IN THE CHURCH – YOUR PASTOR –THOSE WHO NEED CHRIST

ILLUS. MY PRAYER LIST

WHEN YOU PRAY, YOU FREAK OUT THE DEVIL – HE TREMBLES

YOU HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTNERING W/ GOD IMPACTING THE WORLD

ILLUS. TEACHING OUR KIDS TO PRAY FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD

PRAYING FOR OTHERS MEANS I . . .

1. Pray for their SAFETY .

Acts 12:5 “But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.”
(see also vv. 6 – 25)

COMMENT ON STORY

PETER ARRESTED BY HEROD & WAS GOING TO BE EXECUTED

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS WHEN THE CHURCH PRAYS

COMMENT ON ANGEL COMING TO RESCUE HIM

WHEN RHODA HEARD PETER'S VOICE, SHE DIDN'T BELIEVE IT.

DO NOT DOUBT GOD- WE SHOULD BE PEOPLE OF FAITH WHO BELIEVE GOD WILL ANSWER THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO SEEK HIS WILL

- GOOD HEALTH - COMMENT
- SAFE TRAVEL - PRAYED AS WE TRAVELED THIS WK. TO FLORIDA
- OVER ALL PROTECTION – KIDS ESPECIALLY

ILLUS. SHANDA AND I PRAY FOR YOU ALL

ILLUS: CONNECTION CARDS PRAYER REQUESTS ETC

2. Pray for their SIGNIFICANCE

COMMENT ON GODLY INFLUENCE – LAST WEEK

Ephesians 1:16-20 “I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.”

POWER OF CHRIST IS TOTALLY EVIDENT IN THEIR LIVES

DO YOU KNOW ABOUT GOD OR DO YOU REALLY KNOW GOD?

THE DIFFERENCE IS SPENDING TIME WITH HIM.

Specifically, I will pray for:

- GROW CLOSER TO GOD -COMMENT
- BE USED BY GOD -COMMENT

OUR FRIENDS/FAMILY, PEOPLE EVERYWHERE ALL UNIQUELY GIFTED.

LET'S PRAY THAT THEY WILL NOT JUST SPEND TIME IN THIS WORLD BUT INVEST IN IT.
THAT IS A CHOICE

- DO GOD'S WILL

KNOWING GODS WILL & DOING IT IS TWO DIFFERENT FACETS OF LIFE

GOD TELLS US MUST GIVE TO RECEIVE, DIE TO LIVE, AND SERVE TO LEAD.

3. Pray for their SALVATION

1 Timothy 2:1 –6 “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede (PLEAD TO God) on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. (PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRECIDE IN AUTHORITY OVER US) This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone (JOHN 3: 16) to be saved and to understand the truth. For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.”

ALTHOUGH GOD IS ALL POWERFUL, HE HAS CHOSEN TO LET US HELP HIM CHANGE THE WORLD THROUGH OUR PRAYERS. IT'S A MYSTERY, BUT IT'S REALITY THERE IS ONE BRIDGE TO GOD AND THE MAN IS CHRIST

- FOR EVERYONE I KNOW TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST AS THEIR SAVIOR

DO ALL WE CAN TO INVITE PEOPLE TO A PLACE TO KNOW JESUS

Memory Verse:

Ephesians 3:8 “Though I am the least deserving of all God’s people(PAUL MEANS W/O GODS HELP, NEVER BE ABLE TO DO HIS WORK), he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.”

IT'S A PRIVILEGE, BUT ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THE ETERNAL DIRECTION OF SOMEONES LIFE.

REMEMBER, GOD PUT PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE & YOU ARE GOD'S REPRESENTATIVE TO THEM WHO WILL TELL OUR RELATIVES, LOVED ONES, FRIENDS AND CO-WORKERS IF WE DON'T? THAT'S WHY GOD PLACED YOU STRATEGICALLY WHERE YOU ARE.

QUESTION: WHO WILL BE IN HEAVEN BECAUSE OF YOU?

James 5: 16 “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. COMMENT

THE MOST DANGEROUS PRAYER YOU COULD EVER PRAY

Action Step: Pray to God, “Use me”

GET CARD IN WORSHIP GUIDE

Specifically, I will pray for and invite:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

1 Peter 5: 7 “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”

COMMENT ON WORRYING

COMMENT ON WORRYING ABOUT THE ETERNAL DESTINATION OF THOSE WE LOVE

ILLUS. WORRY STONE CHALLENGE

PRAYER

MY NEXT STEP TODAY IS TO:

- . Memorize Ephesians 3:8.
- . Pray for and invite my friends to Freedom Church on Friend Weekend Sept. 13th & 14th.

The pastoral team of Hitt's Chapel (Charles Richardson, Lead Pastor) worked together to produce prayer-centered messages over a six week period. Sermon notes and outlines were preserved from five of the six messages. The titles, text and preachers were

- "Seeking the Lord While He Is Near," Isaiah 55, Mark Book
- "The Lord's Prayer," Matthew 6, Luke 1, Shawn Parker
- "Faith and Prayer," Matthew 21:22, James 5:15, Ryan Mason
- "The Intimacy of Prayer," Revelation 3:20, Charles Richardson
- "Gethsemane, Your Will Not Mine," Matthew 26, Mark Book
- "The Resurrection: Answered Prayer," Hebrews 7:25, Charles Richardson

On four of the weeks, small group prayer guides were produced and used by the congregation on Sunday evenings. Those prayer guides are included elsewhere in this plan book.

Notes and outlines were not available from the first sermon, "Seeking the Lord While He Is Near." Notes and outlines from the remaining sermons have been transcribed in the following pages.

Hitt's Chapel is a growing rural church located a few miles outside of Piggott, Arkansas.

The real strength and long-term effect of this season of prayer is illustrated in the small group prayer guides included in Section 2. Because of the extended time of prayer and because of the wise guidance of the pastors, the congregation greatly aided the Refocus Team of the church as they all sought the Lord's direction for Hitt's Chapel.

A Season of Prayer, Sermon 1
The Lord's Prayer – Teach Us to Pray
Text: Luke 11:1, Matthew 6: 9-13
Shawn Parker

WelcomeOffering will moved to the end of the service

In case you didn't notice we're going to focus on the Lord's Prayer today. I know that many of you have heard it before and have it memorized.

Today we will look into the model that Jesus gave the disciples but also the reason for the instruction as we'll read in Luke 11:1.

We often are scared or uncomfortable to pray. Not just aloud in a crowded room full of people but even alone when we are suppose to be doing the most simple but important facet of the Christian life: Talking to the Father!

PLAY MEET THE PARENTS VIDEO- SCENE WHERE GREG ASKS GRACE BEFOR MEAL

Do you often feel like that when you are talking to God? You just don't know or want to admit what you need to talk to God about.

Let's discuss the meaning of the model of prayer that Jesus gave.

PRAY and READ TEXT

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Luke 11:1

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

The reason for this model of prayer that Jesus gave the disciples was **they asked**. Luke records this in 11:1.

Do you think that these good Jewish born and raised men had no idea how to pray? Of course they did.

Historically, in the culture of the day, it was common for students or disciples to ask their teacher for instructions. It would have been considered rude to interrupt someone praying so the disciples ask Jesus after He was done.

Different teachers might teach special forms of prayer to their own group of disciples. For the exception of the Essenes, Palestinian Jews did have common or pre-written prayers for different occasions.

We have those don't we?

Now I lay me down to sleep.....

God is great God is good. Let us thank Him for our food (pronounced fud)(Lavern and Shirley version)

Those are fine is they are sincere and the Holy Spirit is in charge establishing your thoughts and prayers.

Children often pray naturally. My six-year-old son, Michael was praying for Duke for awhile. One day I asked him who Duke was. His answer was this:

"Duke is the puppy that I don't have yet."

We'll get back to why we have difficulty in our prayer praying in a little while. Let's get to the nuts and bolts of the Lord's Prayer.

vs.(9-10)

Jewish people commonly addressed God as Our Heavenly Father.

One standard Jewish prayer of the day called the "Kaddish" proclaimed, "Exalted and hallowed be his name and may His Kingdom come speedily and soon."

Jewish prayers recognized that God's name would be sanctified and holy in the time of the end when His kingdom would come as the OT prophets said it would. (Ex, Jer, Ezek, Amos)

It was recognized that after His kingdom came God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

By the way.....God does know who He is. I often remind Him when I pray aloud.

"Lord I want to thank you Lord. You're so great Lord. To save my soul Lord. Lead me Lord. Forgive me Lord. Help me Lord.....you get the point.

By the way. I do not want to discourage any of you from offering a public prayer. The point of this message is not to have discouragement but to genuinely come to the Lord and talk to Him.

Vs. (11)

We need things each day and God is concerned about them. This verse makes a reference to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. God provided sustenance to them in

the form of Manna after He first redeemed them. Prayers for basic needs were common in this culture. Food and water are basic need.

Please note: Baked bread does not just represent our dietary needs. (elaborate)

We do not live on bread alone.

vs .(12)

Jewish teaching regarded sin as debts before God. Does that sound familiar? The same Aramaic word could be used for both sin and debt.

Biblical law of that day required monetary debts to be forgiven every seventh and fiftieth year. This illustration of forgiving debts would have been a graphic one especially since ancient Jewish lawyer found ways to circumvent the release of debts so that creditors would continue to lend.

vs .(13)

There are parallels with ancient Jewish and Aramaic prayers that suggest this first line means, don't let us sin when we are tested rather than don't let us be tested.

The next phrase is a statement of praise. (elaborate)

Let's get back to the difficulty in our prayer lives.

Remember Luke's account of we read in 11:1?

Of all the things that the disciples could ask Jesus they asked Him how to pray.

That blows me away. "Lord, teach us to pray".

Bro. Ryan, Bro. Mark and Bro. Charles and I were discussing this very point this January when the season of prayer discussions were in the beginning stages.

What a request. These guys knew how to pray but still wanted instruction.

Our prayers are really a cycle of the movement of God.

He initiates them. When we are receptive to God and allow Him to have his way, the Holy Spirit will lay needs and praise on our hearts. We have to be open.

When real devoted and set-aside time for God to have His way is established, our prayer life becomes more natural. It's not us. It's Him.

If you're afraid you'll pray incorrectly.....Let God have His way.

There's a story maybe you can relate.

Pray For Baby Layne – Guidepost Magazine - February, 2009

By John Howard, Elizabethtown, Kentucky

Five-thirty in the morning. Still dark out. I took a deep breath, the crisp November air chilling my lungs, and climbed into my Ford pickup. I didn't usually drive to work so early, but I had signed on for the morning shift at Lowe's, where I'm a manager. A couple of miles in I took a shortcut I hadn't used in a while, through a growing subdivision. I was surprised to see how many people had already put their Christmas lights up. There was a brilliant glow up ahead, almost beckoning me through the darkness. *Must be one of those new high-tech decorations*, I thought. Then I got closer. This was no decoration. It was a sign. A roughly cut piece of plywood, maybe four by three feet, painted white, with a message bathed in floodlights: "Please Pray for Baby Layne."

Questions bounced around in my mind: Who was this child? What was wrong? Why would someone go to such great lengths to put up a lighted sign for prayer?

Maybe it troubled me because I had been wrestling with prayer for years. I envied people like my wife, Susan. She prayed with such conviction. "Praying brings me closer to God," she'd tell me when I'd ask her about it. "You should try talking to him more—he's a great listener."

But whenever I tried to pray, my words felt mechanical, so rote. God seemed so remote, so far away. How could I be sure he would answer? Or that he would even hear me?

I was about to drive away, but those words: "Please Pray for Baby Layne" were staring at me. Challenging me, almost. All at once something came over me. "Lord, I know I haven't exactly trusted that you hear my prayers," I said. "But this isn't about me. Please heal baby Layne."

The next morning I got into my truck, grabbed a coffee at the drive-through and cut through the subdivision. There it was: that same sign shining through the dark. I put aside my doubts and said another prayer. *Lord, please bless the baby's family today.*

The day after that? You got it. I said another. Before long I had a new morning ritual: Drive. Get coffee. Pray for baby Layne.

A few weeks into it, I told Susan about the sign—and my praying.

"Isn't it nice to start your day off by thinking about someone else?" she said.

"I'm just doing what the sign says," I replied. "I wonder how baby Layne's doing now."

"Why don't you knock on their door and ask?" Susan said.

I didn't want to bother a family that was probably overwhelmed with caring for their sick child. So, instead, I just kept praying.

And something strange happened. One night, lying in bed, I closed my eyes. *Lord, you've given me so much. Thank you.* Then I caught myself. Did I just spontaneously pray? And it felt as natural as breathing! A sense of trust washed over me.

For the first time I felt like God was near, that he was listening to me. As if praying for baby Layne had opened up the lines of communication.

One spring afternoon I finally mustered up the courage to stop by the house in the subdivision. There was a man—about my age, fiftyish—in a white baseball cap, mowing the lawn. *Now's my chance,* I thought. I pulled into the driveway.

I got out of my truck. The man saw me and reached down to shut off the lawn mower.

"I'm John," I said, trying to find the right words. "I just wanted to tell you, I...I saw your sign a few months back and I've been praying for baby Layne ever since."

He didn't say a word, just stood there. *Uh-oh, I guess I shouldn't have come,* I thought.

Then the man's eyes pooled with tears. "I'm Kenny," he said. "Baby Layne is my grandson, and hearing that really means a lot, sir. Thank you." Then he reached out and gave me a bear hug. It felt a little awkward, but I didn't mind.

Kenny and I stood on the lawn and talked for a while. Baby Layne, he told me, had been born nearly four months premature—weighing just over a pound—and had undergone open-heart surgery.

"The doctors didn't think he would make it," Kenny said. "But I wanted to do something to help so I made the sign."

"I'm glad you did," I said. "Because there's another reason I came by today to talk to you."

"And what's that?" he asked.

"Well, praying for your grandson has really changed my life," I said. "I'm a lot closer to God now. I wasn't so close before."

"He does work in unusual ways, you know," Kenny said. "Just think, it took a *real* sign from God to get your attention!" He opened the front door.

"C'mon in and meet Layne. He's doing great now."

Layne was on the couch with his grandmother, cradled in her arms. She handed him to me. I gazed at his small cherubic face, and his eyes lit up, as bright as the sign that brought him so unexpectedly into my life.

Now Layne is a healthy bouncy three-year-old. The other day my wife and I stopped by for a visit—we're like another set of grandparents to Layne by now—and I couldn't help but think about all those doubts I had once wrestled with.

Does God really hear my prayers? One look into Layne's periwinkle eyes tells me the answer.

Our prayer should be as natural as talking to the greatest friend we could ever have.

If you are saved, think back to a time when you asked for God's forgiveness. You prayed earnestly. You prayed genuinely when you asked Jesus to be Lord of your life and accepted Him as Savior.

If we are saved, why don't we still pray like that?

If you are not saved, I want to introduce you to a something more valuable than memorizing the prayer Jesus modeled for the disciples. It's a prayer of salvation.

Some may call it a sinner's prayer. Guess what? There is no word-for-word prayer to memorize or mimic when the Holy Spirit is convicting your heart and you allow God to have His way.

This sounds simple but it may go something like this:

- 1. Father forgive me of my sin.**
- 2. Jesus I accept you as Savior.**
- 3. Be Lord of my life. I give my life to you.**

Is that too simple?

I ask you folks again, why don't we pray like that any more?

Ryan Mason

Introduce faith and prayer with simple definitions, link them together and read:

Matthew 21:22 And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.

James 5:15a And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick,

Several more, pretty amazing.

How important is faith?

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Pretty important, what is it anyway?

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Definition, really? Limited definition – faith give substance to that which is future and invisible

Chapter 11 gives us a tour to show how faith motivated all of these people to pursue a promise that was not yet, a promise that we have already received. Jesus.

One of these characters.....

Set up Romans 4, focus on 16-21

1. There is an inseparable link between faith and grace. We approach God by grace through faith.
 - a. Faith is a response (like when we get saved.)
 - b. No deserving
 - c. No bargaining
 - d. No earning
2. Faith does not consider the circumstances from a human perspective.
3. Faith requires obedience (again not to earn, it's still simply a response, but at times God instructs us to respond in certain ways)
4. Faith grows when we worship.
 - a. In worship we focus on God and not us and it sinks into our heart who God is

- b. Rom 10:17 – faith comes from the word.
 - c. Because the word tells us who God is and what God does.
 - d. Abraham had a promise. The word is our promise. It reveals God’s will.
5. Faith is being fully convinced that God is able to do what he says he’s gonna do.
- a. Often, our god is too small.
 - b. God’s Gonna do the same for you and me.
 - c. Do you recall that certain chapter

Where pharaoh’s men were after all of Israel and made God's people flee
 God drowned pharaoh’s men and the children crossed upon dry land
 I'm tellin’ you God's gonna do the same for you and me

I believe He is while other's just think He was
 While they suppose He did, I know He still does
 And I'm holdin’ to the promise where two or three agree
 God's gonna do the same for you and me

Well He made their sons and daughters
 He made the wine out of water
 He was there when Peter crossed on the raging sea
 And if He fed the little sparrow and
 He put the meal in the widow's barrel
 I'm tellin’ you God's gonna do the same for you and me

- d. God doesn’t change. God is the same. God doesn’t fail.

Tell story. College. Job. Still that prayer is being answered.

We need to respond to God in faith. We need to seek him for who he is, not just what he can do. “If my people” We need to be praying in faith. In faith we need to obey when God answers our prayers.

Revelation 3:20
Charles Richardson

Prayer is a two-way street of communication. We are told time and again in scripture to take our burdens to the Lord. Peter tells us to “Cast our cares on the Lord for He cares for you.” This can be an experience of great relief for us where we can cry out to the Lord in way that we would not to others. Indeed God does intend for this to be our only conversation. However, this is only one side of the conversation. Oftentimes we are intimidated by the possibility of hearing back from God, for fear of what He may say to us. There is an understood sense that when God speaks it is always God-sized things He has to say. We understand a reverence and a sense of expectation. If we took time to listen to what He was saying to us, then we feel accountable to it. And so, many talk to God, but few listen to God. Many are those who have wonderful worshipful noisy experiences of giving praise, honor and glory to God in church services, but avoid quiet time with Him for fear of hearing Him. The misconception is that if God speaks to me and I listen, sacrifice on my part is always the result and I cannot bear it. Indeed, many times God does require sacrifice on our part, but the sacrifice is only the action of removing something that currently limits our relationship with Jesus. Though the sacrifice appears great from our position in life, our current perspective, the flood of blessings it holds back, like a dam in a river, is greater yet many times over. Only in the intimacy of prayer can we get a glimpse of these blessings as well as see the sacrifice for what it really is.

Turn to text.

Church of Laodicia – lukewarm, neither hot or cold

Talk about what Christ had to say about this church

They had their own angel - He had invested in them, and still was

They were a church - He recognized them as such

They were deceived

They were poor - in spirit

They were blind - could not see things for what they really were

They were naked - exposed to everyone else

They were miserable - life of defeat, caught up in always trying to please God

They were called out to by Christ - He attempted to counsel them

They were loved

Read text.

Christ longs to enter in and share a meal with us. Food is love. Meal time is family time. Eating together is intimacy.

Our sacrifice is only to open the door and be willing to prepare a meal. The result is that He comes in, helps us in preparing the meal and then joins us in intimate time of fellowship.

Being with Jesus intimately is always worth the sacrifice it requires.

Being alone with God in intimate prayer can be;

scary because of what He may ask of us

intimidating because of who He is

humiliating because of who He reveals us to be

In the intimacy of prayer we hear from God.

Intimacy in prayer is vital. Intimacy is a closeness that requires a dropping of the guard, a transparency, and a vulnerability.

Only in these kinds of relationships can we have genuinely honest conversations about ourselves and our truest motivations and desires.

This is the kind of relationship that is intended for marriages. Frankly, the manifestation of this in marital relationships is seen in the act of consummation. Transparency, vulnerability, freedom to be completely at ease with oneself in the presence of another. Sadly, fewer and fewer marital relationships attain this intimacy, and consummation becomes simply an act of personal pleasure and gratification.

I have always believed that breakdown of the home goes hand-in-hand with the weakening of the Church. As churches weaken or become improperly focused on worldly ideas of success and growth or defeated ideas of maintenance, the individual homes represented in its fellowship receive less and less spiritual training and biblical teaching and thus the level of spiritual maturity drops with each generation, and thus the home and marriage continually breakdown.

Spiritual maturity naturally contributes to the covenant relationship of the marital union as well as all other relationships that flow from it.

Such an intimate relationship is what God desires to have with us.

This cannot be a one-sided relationship, where one is only a taker and the other a giver. This is a shallow relationship if one person is self-centered and thus easily offended thus causing the other to always be on guard with their words and actions for fear of upsetting the other and having to deal with their childish reactions.

Only in hearing from God does one make the decisions of “change for the better.”

So, if we avoid spending time with God in prayer, then we are not growing in our relationship with Him, and thus not maturing into the humble Christian servant we are expected to be.

If this is you, then likely you have become a Christian who;

is hard to deal with (lack of maturity always shows itself in a self-centered inward attitude and behavior. This person is a whiner and/or fit thrower because something hasn't gone their way and lacks the spiritual maturity to deal with it any differently)

and/or has become only a taker and never a giver where the Church is concerned (another common symptom of lack of spiritual maturity is a blindness to the needs of others. Meeting one's own needs always shows through as this person's truest motivation).

Hearing from God we make the big, sometimes hard, humbling decisions to

- Give more of myself to God
- Begin to tithe, return to tithe
- Stop my marital infidelity
- Answer God's call on my life to ministry
- Salvation
- Repentance

Come out of my self-serving, inwardly-focused, shell to become a Christ-focused, Church-serving follower of Jesus.

A Season of Prayer, Sermon 4
Gethsemane: Your Will Not Mine
Matthew 26:26-46

Mark Book

In the moments I am going to share with you today we can only guess at what was going on in the heart and mind of Jesus. I think, though, that in his mind he could still hear the sound of the voices from a few days before.

Just a few days earlier he had heard the shouts of those who gathered saying “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” It is that moment of his Triumphal entry that we commemorate today. We can have joy as we remember that at least for one moment, Jesus was received as He was, a King, The Son of God. We want to linger there as perhaps we would think Jesus might have liked to in the adoration and acclaim of the crowd. But Jesus couldn’t linger there. He knew He had come to Jerusalem for another purpose. He already knew that this particular visit to the Holy City was going to be different. I think He could almost hear the voices of another crowd that would soon be shouting in the same city “Crucify him! Crucify him!”. How quickly things can change in just a few days.

But above these voices of the crowds Jesus heard one voice more clearly than the rest, more loudly, more definitely. He heard the voice of his Father. He knew what He had to do. He knew the final phase of the mission had begun. What a mission it was! To come to Jerusalem to be betrayed by one of His own, to suffer shame, false accusation, the cruelest of inhumane punishment and finally to die nailed to a cross, naked before the world. For the first time he knew the experience of sin, not His own but instead the sin of every person past, present, and future.

Isaiah puts it this way (Isaiah 53:5-6) “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Even though we can never grasp it, try though we might to understand that Jesus knew what was coming, we can wonder “How could he face it?”. Despite the fact that He had the knowledge of what lay ahead, how could he possibly be ready? The Word tell us that He did what we often fail to do. He prayed.

Jesus Prayed

After spending one last Passover with his disciples where he shared new and deep things they didn’t yet understand, they sang a song and then walked to the Garden of Gethsemane.

There, taking Peter, James and John with Him apart, feeling the full weight of sin upon him, Jesus prayed these words, "My Father, it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." This seems an unusual prayer for Jesus to pray.

If Jesus already knew what was meant to be, why did he pray?

Jesus understood an important thing we forget. Prayer is not just telling God what we want; it is also about listening to what He wants. It is very easy to pray prayers to the Father similar to the first half of Jesus' prayer where he prayed "Father, if it is possible let this cup (situation, circumstance, trouble, problem) pass from me." Isn't it easy to pray like that? I know I've prayed many prayers like that one.

When we face a challenge on the horizon or even one we suspect might come, we are quick to ask that we be delivered from it. Or we may even begin to bargain with god and try offering Him alternatives. We might even suggest "Lord, I don't want that; how about we do it this way? How about this cup instead?"

We traveled to Bulgaria to bring our son home. At age 19 months he could communicate despite knowing mostly baby-talk and no English. When his mother was feeding him from the glasses we had in the hotel room, he would politely take his knuckles and nudge back the glass when he was finished. He would then tap the other glass with his knuckles to show her what he wanted. Perhaps, in some ways, that is how we respond to God!

And God is merciful and gracious and we are often delivered. We never have to face many things that could have been.

Not My Will

We have to understand that Jesus didn't just pray to make his request of God. He also prayed to get himself perfectly, completed in line with the will of God. Each time He prayed for this cup to pass He conditioned his request with submission. He agreed to relinquish control.

He said, "Not my will, Father but yours."

That is the place in our prayers where we often struggle. We are eager to pray when we think in some way to manipulate God so that we can get what we want. But how often do we come truly seeking, trying our best to get our heart, our will submitted to His? Have you ever been semi-deluded?

The reason we may feel frustrated, stunted in our prayers is because we only pray half-heartedly and with the first half of the prayer only. I think it would increase our success in prayer if we would pray as Jesus did by truly placing everything we ask for under that conditional request of not my will but yours.

James 4:3 says, "Ye, ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts." Gayla and I learned through taking archery classes in college that your degree of success is greatly increased when you aim at the right target! The same applies when praying in the will of God.

The Will of the Father Is Best

Jesus prayed in this way because He knew something, trusted in something and someone. He knew that no matter what it brought that the will of his Father would be best.

Truth or not? We don't always trust that, do we? Way down deep we can wonder, "Does God really know what He's doing?"

It always, always comes back to the faith thing. Hebrews 11:6 tell us "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

We are OK with this concept when rewards come quickly and easily, but it becomes much harder when the reward comes after something we simply don't want to go through. Sometimes all we can see is the cup we don't want to drink and we say "Let this pass" without giving a thought to what God might bring about through the circumstances that present themselves.

Jesus submitted. He trusted in the Father's plan for the outcome.

Joy To Come

Hebrews 12:2 says "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

What joy was to come?

Jesus knew in Gethsemane what He was about to endure. He also knew what would come after. He knew there would come a moment when He could say "It is finished!" He also

knew a glorious Sunday morning was coming when by the power of God He would live again. He knew through this process that He would go home to His Father again. He knew the veil in the Temple and the one in heaven that separated man from God would be ripped open. He knew that which was lost would be redeemed. He knew that those who dwelt in death could then live. He knew God's enemy would be defeated and the Father glorified. He knew that you and I would have a place offered to us with Him if we only believe and accept it.

For all of that Jesus endured the cross knowing that the bitter cup would bring joy in the end.

Unless I Drink It

Jesus knew when He came into the garden what ultimately had to be. He wording changes just a little in verse 42 "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." Notice unless I drink it. Jesus knew the events that were to take place were His cup to drink, His lot, His destiny and His alone. There was simply no one else who could do these things.

This echoes the thoughts in Revelation 5. John writes of a book sealed with seven seals and an angel who cries out "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the book?" John weeps because no one is found worthy. Then an elder tells him that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed and is worthy to open the book. When John looks he saw a lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne.

Heaven erupts in praise saying of the Lamb "You are worthy to open the book because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God ... worthy is the lamb that was slain"

"After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities (Isaiah 52:11)."

No one else could drink this cup, make this sacrifice. Because no one else could be that sinless lamb. No one else could take our place on the cross. No one else was worthy.

Our Gethsemane

Trust for us: We may pray, "Father, let this cup pass from me," but the truth is there are some cups which no one else can drink but you. Some things are just meant for us. We can try to ride the coat tails will just rub off. But, listen to me, no one else can love God for you and no one else can accept that all that it means on our behalf. No one else can be a Christian Mom or Dad or Son or Daughter for you, that's your place, your cup.

Because of these facts we find ourselves in Gethsemane every day. You might pray, "Lord, let this cup of testing or obedience pass from me. I want to lost my temper, follow my lust, indulge myself."

You may say, "I don't think I can do it. I'm not strong enough, able enough."

But if we want to be like Jesus, we will finish the prayer and say, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Finding Strength

Understand that Jesus came not only to Gethsemane to make his request and seek his Father's will, but also to seek the strength to do what the Father had laid out for him.

He told the disciples when He came and found them sleeping (v. 41) "Watch and pray, so you will not fall into temptation, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Was He speaking of them? Himself? He was full God, yet fully human. Don't we believe that to be true?

We should never be foolish enough to try to do spiritual warfare on our own. What this Season of Prayer has been about is coming to admit our need for strength greater than our own and to tap into a power that God offers and only He possesses.

Jesus Found Strength

In the last verses of the passage He ends his time of prayer. He rouses the sleeping disciples with the news that it is time to get up and meet the betrayer. There was no hiding behind trees, no sitting, waiting for them to come. He rose and faced what was coming. After his time of prayer He started the next, final act knowing who He was and who God was.

It could be argued that his prayer in Gethsemane was the greatest prayer ever prayed. Everything hinged on his submission, his fulfilling the will of God.

You may have come this morning with a decision on your mind, in your heart. You may have been praying for a while, "Let this cup pass," but it hasn't. Now, today, you may know

inside that you need to pray the other half of Jesus' prayer, "Not my will, but thine be done." In many ways that would be the greatest prayer you will ever pray.

You may have been afraid to pray that kind of prayer, afraid to commit to what it will mean. I urge you not to be afraid. Remember God's plan is always going to be better than ours. Remember you can trust him to reward those who earnestly seek him.

If you are struggling, have questions, need strength, do what Jesus did: pray!

Answered Prayer
Final Days of Passion Week
Charles Richardson

The earliest tradition of the handing down of the Christian story is one of story-telling. Today, I want to tell you a story, the greatest story ever told. So, if any of the children want to come to the front, I would love for them to do so.

While children are coming, explain that preaching's earliest form wasn't just the declaring of truth, but declaring of truth through a story.

I want to tell you the story of the first Easter.

Begin by telling about Passover Week. Be careful not to go into too much detail and allow this to dominate the story. Just set the scene. Then begin with Thursday's events.

He and the disciples are in Jerusalem getting ready for the Passover meal.

Thursday

1. Judas makes his deal with the chief priests. For 30 pieces of silver he sold Jesus out.
2. Passover meal. AKA Last Supper. Jesus announces He would be betrayed by one of them there.
 - a. Washes disciples feet. Even Judas'.
 - b. He institutes the Lord's Supper, Communion, Eucharist. During this meal is when Judas leaves to report to the Chief Priests where they can find Jesus to arrest Him.

Take Communion

- c. Sang a hymn and left for Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, at dark.
3. Garden of Gethsemane
 - a. Once there He tells them that all of them would abandon Him that night. Peter is told he will deny Jesus 3 times before morning.
 - b. Prays for an hour, 3 times. Each time praying "Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me – yet it must not be what I want, but what you want."
 - i. Was in terrible anguish over what was about to happen to Him. Sweat great drops of blood.
 - ii. After each hour He would come to His disciples and they would be asleep, they were supposed to be praying for Him.

c. The last time He wakes them to that His betrayal is at hand. By now it was very late in the night, about midnight.

Friday

1. While Jesus was still telling the disciples to wake up because His betrayer was coming, Judas and a mob torches and Roman soldiers with swords and spears arrived.

a. Judas had told those with him that he would give them a sign to let them know which one was Jesus, he would give Him a kiss on the cheek. Judas quickly went to Jesus saying, "Greetings Master," then kissed Him on the cheek. Jesus responded, "Judas would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

b. Jesus then asked the mob who it was they were looking for and the responded, "Jesus of Nazareth." He answered saying, "I am He." When He did they retreated and fell to the ground at His power. He asked again, and again they responded the same. He answered this time saying, "I have told you I am He, if I am He that you seek then let these others go free."

c. Just then Peter could see what was happening and He drew his sword and swung it, cutting off the right ear of one of the High Priest's servants name Malchus. Jesus immediately rebuked Peter, then picked up Malchus' ear and miraculously put it back on.

d. Then the mob seized Jesus tying His hands together. With this, the disciples began to flee for their lives. The mob caught one of them by his garment, but he was able to shed the garment and run away naked. We think that was Mark.

2. First the mob took Jesus to the High Priest house where all the chief priest, scribes, and elders had assembled for a midnight trial.

a. They questioned Jesus hard trying to find something against Him, but they were unable to do so.

b. Finally, two men came forward to make a false allegation, after hearing it the High Priest asked Jesus straight out. "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?"

c. Jesus answered by telling them "Yes". At this the High Priest tore his clothes and cried out that Jesus had spoken blasphemy and asked the assembly what their verdict was as a result. They replied by saying Jesus deserved to die.

d. Then they spit in His face and knocked Him around. They even blinded folded Him and hit Him, then made fun of Him saying, "Tell us if you are the Son of God, who just hit you?"

3. Peter's denial

a. 3 times, young maiden 12-13 yrs old, even cursed the third time

4. Jesus is taken to Pilate

a. Judas tries to return silver, commits suicide. Potter Field-burial ground for foreigners, still called "field of blood" today, is purchased. Jeremiah's prophesy fulfilled.

5. Jesus before Pilate

a. He questions Him and finds nothing to charge Him with and tells the religious leaders so. They press Pilate and mention Jesus is from Galilee so Pilate sends Him to Herod because that is Herod's jurisdiction.

6. Pilate passes Him to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration

a. Herod was glad to have Jesus before him because he had heard so much about Jesus. He wanted Jesus to perform a miracle for Him, he wanted a show. Jesus refused and was silent. Herod and his men scoffed and jeered at Jesus, made fun of Him and dressed Him in a gorgeous cloak because it was said that He claimed to be king of the Jews.

7. Herod sent Him back to Pilate

a. Pilate again interrogates Jesus and again finds nothing laid against Him worthy of the death penalty as the Chief priests had cried out for. Pilate told them that he was going to let Jesus go, but they immediately cried out, "No, no, take this man away from us!"

8. Jesus or Barabbas. People choose Barabbas at Pharisees prompting. Crowd cries out for His crucifixion.

a. It was the custom of Pilate to set one prisoner free during Passover each year, so he offered to the people a choice between Jesus (who he found no fault in) and Barabbas (a convicted criminal, for rioting and murder). The people cried out for Barabbas to be set free and of Jesus they cried out, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him."

b. Pilate again told the people that he found no fault in Jesus, that he would have Jesus flogged to appease them, and then set Him free. At this the people roared in response (shouted him down), "crucify Him, crucify Him," Pilate again declared Jesus' innocence and as a symbol of it to the people washed his hands in water saying to the people, "I take no responsibility for this man's

death, see to that yourselves”, and the people cried out in response, “let His blood on us and our children!”

c. Pilate then had Jesus flogged and handed Him over to the people. The chief priest along with some soldiers took charge of Jesus. They stripped Him of His clothes leaving only a scarlet cloak on Him. They then twisted some thorny twigs into a crown and pressed it on His head and placed a stick in His right hand. Then they bowed before Him making fun of Him saying “hail, king of the Jews.” Then they spit on Him and took the stick from His hand and hit Him in the face with it. When they were done with their fun they again strip Him of the scarlet cloak and put some of his own clothes on Him, and placed His own cross on His back and led Him down the middle of town out of town to Golgotha.

9. Via Delarosa, Simon the Cyrene.

a. Along the way Jesus falls under the weight of His cross and the weakness of His wounds. The soldiers get a man from the crowd, Simon from Cyrene, and make him carry Jesus’ cross the rest of the way.

10. The crucifixion between two thieves.

11. Jesus’ death. Darkness, temple vale torn, rocks split, earthquake, graves were opened.

12. Buried in a borrowed tomb, Joseph of Arimathea, guarded with Roman guards.

a. It was late on Friday and the Sabbath began at sunset. So Jesus’ body was quickly wrapped and rushed to the tomb. The ladies followed, made note of the tomb with intent of coming back the first day of the week (day after Sabbath) to prepare the body with spices as was their custom.

b. The chief priest petitioned Pilate to place guards at the tomb, because Jesus had declared He would rise from the dead and they didn’t want His followers taking His body and faking His resurrection. Pilate agreed.

Sunday

13. Resurrection on first day of week, day after Sabbath (our Saturday)

a. Ladies come early to the tomb, met by an angel who declares that Jesus is not there, He has risen.

b. Soldiers were paid to say His followers had over-powered them and taken the body.

We can have complete confidence in the His purpose and plan. His consideration in hearing our prayer goes far beyond our greatest understanding. Our wisdom is His foolishness.

God sees the moment while seeing eternity past as well as eternity forward.

It is going to be all right because God forgives sin, He has a plan.

Just as Jesus trusted the Father to lead him faithfully in only, never a destructive path, a path that benefits the kingdom, so we can have such a confidence and faith that God answers our prayers, not only orchestrating our circumstance for the moment of our lives and lifetimes, but also for life time of all humanity.

A day of celebration, God has heard and answered the prayers of every human that sought Him for a Savior since the beginning of human origins. Another great day of human & heavenly celebration is coming when, again, God will answer the prayers of every person that sought His return since Jesus' ascension. He is coming back!

Jesus was the answer to the prayers of the Old Testament; He is the enabler, power to the prayers of the New Testament. Without Jesus' resurrection we have no voice with God. We have no privilege of prayer.